NANCY LEE'S LOOKOUT

MARGARET WARDE

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HOW THEY HAD CHATTERED

NANCY LEE'S LOOKOUT

By

MARGARET WARDE

Author of

THE "BETTY WALES' BOOKS"

NANCY LEE

NANCY LEE'S SPRING TERM

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Nancy Lee's Lookout

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Introduction

NANCY LEE was at Fair Oaks School when her readers made her acquaintance in her first story, "Nancy Lee." It was there that she met the Terrible Twins: tall, awkward Jane and pretty little Christina. The three friends called themselves the Triangle, and in the spring term they formed the mysterious order of W. W.'s.

But "Nancy Lee's Spring Term" at Fair Oaks School is a story in itself. For it was then that Nancy had her great adventure with Timmy Lee Marshall Raftery, that adorable infant whose arrival at Fair Oaks ushered in an era of unprecedented excitement and interest. When Timmy had to be taken home, Nancy was a proud member of his escort-party, and she had just returned from that mission when the story of her summer at Halcyon Bay opens.

MARGARET WARDE.

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Nancy Lee's Lookout

CHAPTER I

SUMMER PLANS

"Oh, mother dear, what do you suppose our sweet little Timmy is doing now?" demanded Nancy Lee, darting out upon the piazza of the Lee family's summer cottage, where her mother sat sewing.

It was a perfect June afternoon, all cool greenery near the piazza, and beyond, blue shimmering sea, sparkling and dancing in the sunshine. But Nancy, all out of tune with the summer peace, swept out of the house like a wild March wind, perched uncertainly on the piazza railing for an instant, and then dropped into a wicker chair near mother's, and leaned limply back against the scarlet cushions with an expression of petulant misery on her usually merry face. The wild March breeze seemed almost ready to blow up an April shower.

And yet there was nothing the matter with Nancy Lee, except that she had been having too

good a time. She had just reached home after a very exciting journey, had found more excitements awaiting her at the journey's end, and now she was feeling the reaction that all joyous adventures are likely to bring in their wake.

"I just can't settle down to anything!" sighed poor Nancy, without waiting for mother to answer her question.

It was rather more than a week since Fair Oaks School had closed for the summer vacation, and Timmy Lee Marshall Raftery, adored young protégé of Fair Oaks, had started for his Western home, under the guardianship of Lloyd Mallory, Margaret Lewis, Jeanne Durand, and Nancy Lee, with little Miss Dutton to chaperon the expedition. There was no real reason why Nancy, not being a Western girl, should have been of Timmy's party, except one. It was she who had found the adorable Timmy and presented him to Fair Oaks School. On this account he had always seemed to belong a little more to Nancy than to any one else. This fact and the possession of an understanding and generous father had secured for Nancy the chance of helping to escort Timmy home. And now Timmy was safe in the custody of his doting parents and Nancy had likewise arrived in the midst of her family circle. Her home-coming had brought her another bit of excitement, as un-

expected and delightful as her father's permission to make the trip out to Pine Ridge, Michigan, with Timmy. And father was at the bottom of this second surprise also—he was certainly a perfectly splendid father!

He had met his daughter in Boston, listened, almost appreciatively enough to suit her, to the story of her adventures in Pine Ridge and at Camp Sixty-Nine, and when even Nancy's supreme interest in Timmy could evolve no new details about him, and the journey was beginning to seem very hot and dusty and tedious, father suddenly began to enliven it by mysterious references to a grand surprise that awaited Nancy at the end of the trip.

Yes, mother had been surprised, and brother Dick. As for the rest of the Lee family,—William, aged eleven, and Josephine, aged thirteen, more intimately known as Bill and Joe, because they were inseparable and Josephine was a good deal of a tomboy,—they, too, had been tremendously surprised, Mr. Lee assured his excited daughter. And did they like it? Mother and Dick did; Bill and Joe hadn't been sure, when father, who had had to hurry right back to business, after having escorted his family to Halcyon Bay and sprung his surprise on them, had seen the volatile pair last.

"Then I suppose I shall like it," said Nancy sagely, "if it's the kind of thing grown-ups like, and children can't appreciate at first."

"You've grown up amazingly since I saw you last spring," teased father.

"Well, I truly have," Nancy defended herself earnestly. "It may not show much outside, but I feel as old and responsible as anything. I'm going to do so many useful things to help this summer!"

"The surprise will like to hear that," said father solemnly.

"The surprise—will—like —— Oh, father, it's not any kind of governess, is it?"

Father shook his head. "But it will appreciate small attentions from useful young persons like yourself. It's not quite finished, you see. That is, it hasn't fully adapted itself to our family ways."

Nancy meditated. "Are you talking fair, father? One minute the surprise sounds like a person, and then like a thing, and then like a new pet that has to be trained not to claw the furniture, like the Spoiled Kitten, or chew up mother's best shoes, like Dick's collie. Did Josephine take good care of the Spoiled Kitten on the train, father? He hates to travel so. Why, here we are!"

It was quite dark by the time they got to the

end of the long trolley ride that supplemented the train trip. Nancy thought it rather silly of father to take a carriage, when the house was just a step off, up Rocky Neck Hill and down Willow Lane. But when their driver kept straight on, past Willow Lane, past the Inn, and on along Lighthouse Road, Nancy was first bewildered, and then, in a flash, she understood.

"You've bought us 'The Crags,' father! That's the grand surprise!"

"Good guess!" chuckled Mr. Lee. "Your mother was at least twice as long making out what was up."

"Oh, I wanted that place so!" sighed Nancy blissfully. "It's such a nice, squatty, friendly house. Ours was so dreadfully plain and tall and thin. And the grounds are so big and so fascinating!"

"You've never half seen them, Miss Cock-sure," laughed her father. "You were always wishing last summer that Miss Willis would let you wander around by yourself when you went to call on her, instead of giving you high tea on the piazza, and then sending you off for a ride in her launch."

Nancy laughed. "And she never once forgot to tell her captain to bring us back to the Inn dock, so we shouldn't have the long walk home. I was always hoping she wouldn't mention it, and

then I could have been brought back to her dock and wandered a little speck, maybe, on the way up to the house to thank her for the sail. No, I haven't really explored at all. But all the same, I know that 'The Crags' is perfectly, perfectly fascinating."

"How so?" demanded father.

"Because it's big enough and tangly enough to make you long to explore it!" returned Nancy promptly. "And it's right on the water, with its very own rocks ——"

"And its very own mosquitoes!" scoffed father.

Nancy reached over and squeezed his hand lovingly. "You're an old dear, father. First, to let me go home with Timmy, and then, this! Of course the new house is for all of us, but I was the one that wanted it most, and I'll try to pay up by ——"

A war-whoop from the roadside interrupted Nancy's grateful little speech, and William and Josephine leaped disconcertingly out of the shadows.

"Hello, Nancy!" shrieked William.

"Does she know about the surprise, father?" demanded Josephine.

"Did you remember to bring us the fish-lines?" chanted the two in noisy unison.

"Climb in, you rogues," laughed father. "You

ought to be in bed. Anybody that's going deep sea fishing with me before breakfast ——"

"Oh, joyous, joyous!" sang Bill and Joe.

"Here they are at last!" Mother and Dick were down by the gate to meet the travelers—that fascinating rustic gate with red roses growing over it. It was too dark to see the roses, but Nancy reached up to feel them with one arm, while she hugged mother with the other.

"Oh, I can't wait to see how it looks, now that it's ours!" she cried, dancing down the dark, little woodsy path, with the house lights gleaming a welcome at the other end.

Beyond the piazza it was all velvety black, except where some yacht's lamps twinkled green and gold and scarlet, or the stars shone softly high above them. But Nancy could feel the rocks and the pretty stone boat-house and the rippling waters of Halcyon Bay as surely as, a minute before, she had felt the red roses.

"Oh, you can see the lighthouse lamp, Dick! You can, you can!" she cried delightedly, leaning out over the piazza railing. "Do you remember how we discussed it last summer, and you said one couldn't?"

"I was right, too, till father had the foliage pruned up a bit," explained Dick loftily. Dick had lived at "The Crags" for more than a week,

and could affect the superiority of an old inhabitant. "Don't you 'oh' and 'ah' too much tonight," he advised his excited sister. "Save some thunder till you see how father's had the boat fixed up, and you've played tennis on our own court."

"Oh, is there really a tennis-court?" gasped Nancy. "Where? I never saw it."

"Off down there." Dick waved vaguely into the soft darkness. "You can't get as much as a sight of it from the house or the road. It's a dandy court too, or will be after we've played on it a bit. Now aren't you sorry you wasted a week chasing home with that kid you call Timmy?"

"Certainly not," declared Nancy vehemently. "But now I'm here I simply can't wait for it to be morning."

"Guess you'll just about have to, all the same," adjured Dick, resuming his superior air. "Besides, this new house is fine, but otherwise nothing's doing here at Halcyon. None of our special crowd has come yet—most of 'em seem not to be coming at all this year. Two stunning girls live next door, and that tall boy who was at the Inn last August—the fellow who did the diving stunts. I haven't talked to 'em yet. Mother says she'll call soon, because it's their first summer at Halcyon and our third."

"Oh, yes," said Nancy absently. "I'm glad there are boys and girls next door, Dick, but I haven't seen my room. I can't be interested yet a while in anything as far away as next door."

No one can half see a new house by lamp-light. In the morning Nancy felt impelled to make the whole tour of inspection over again, beginning with her own little room, which she loved at once, because the bay glistened outside of one window and a giant cedar-tree shaded the other. As Nancy was dressing, a little brown bird hopped from the tree to her window-sill and chirped good-morning.

"Just like Camp Sixty-Nine," smiled Nancy, and realized that she had actually been awake half an hour without once thinking of Timmy.

Josephine's room fronted the road. "Mother offered me a new one up on the third floor," explained the little sister importantly, "but I'd rather see who goes by. And I think, Nancy, that I could crawl across that piazza roof and shin down the post, if ever I should happen to want to get outdoors in a rush."

"You'd better not try it," warned Nancy severely. "It's much too dangerous."

"Um!" sniffed Josephine, "I'll bet I wouldn't fall. Good-bye! Father's trilling for us to go out in the boat."

Nancy inspected the pretty guest-room, which she hoped would hold several Fair Oaks girls before the summer was over, and then climbed up to the third floor, where Dick and William had their quarters under the eaves. You could see the lighthouse splendidly from up there, and there were cupboards in the niches below the dormer windows that Nancy coveted. But the cedar-tree didn't grow up to the third story, and when you weren't thinking, you bumped your head against the sloping ceilings.

"I should probably bump mine pretty often," sighed Nancy, after one such experience, and ran down to say good-morning to mother. Mother's room had four windows, with a porch, shaded by the other side of Nancy's cedar-tree, opening out from one long one.

"That's to be my private rest-room," explained Mrs. Lee, "where I can go when I want to be absolutely undisturbed. I'm glad you've come, little daughter, to help me take charge here. I've had rather a hard winter with Josephine's measles and Billy's teeth and Dick's dog. But if you can be hands and feet and brains for me for a few weeks, I shall be quite ready to take hold again in time to start you off for another year at school."

"I will, mother. I'll help you a lot," promised Nancy enthusiastically. "But before I can be

brains for anybody, even myself, I've simply got to look around at everything here and make myself understand that it's all ours. So far I feel—mixed."

Mother laughed. "Of course you do. Look around all you like, and don't hurry. Besides, I didn't mean that I want you to give me all your time. Dick needs a jolly companion as much as I need a helper. He's wandered around quite forlornly, waiting for you to come and make friends with the young people next door. He quite depends on you to begin acquaintances for him, you know, Nancy."

"Does he?" Nancy was secretly delighted to find that the debonair Dick depended on her for anything. "Well, I'll try. But first I must see the tennis-court and the boat-house and everything else that belongs to us."

"Breakfast," suggested mother, but Nancy was half-way down-stairs.

The land belonging to "The Crags" was just a three-acre square of unspoiled moorland, rocky, bushy, wooded in spots, highest by the road and sloping gradually down to the rocks and the water. Nancy easily discovered the wide path that led to the boat-house, the last bit being an easy flight of stone stairs cut down through the cliff. A narrower path branching to the left went to the ten-

nis-court, cleverly hidden in greenery, with high side-nets to keep the balls within bounds. A little door in the wire netting let the players in and out of the enclosure, and there was a comfortable green bench for spectators or tired players. A tennis-court of one's own seemed to Nancy the absolute height of luxury. She did wish that Dick would come back from fishing and play on it with her. Meanwhile, she explored the rocks for good seats, —it would be splendid to watch the sunset from one's very own rocks,—returned to admire the tennis-court again, followed an overgrown by-path from there to the side fence, and stared over at the house next door without catching even a glimpse of the two handsome girls and the diving boy, lost the path on the way back, and discovered a patch of dainty cranberry vines, which seemed somehow as splendid to own as rocks.

"I'd better see how far we go on the other side," considered Nancy, spying a second uncertain little trail that branched to the right from the boat-house path. "I'm glad there's a vacant lot on that side of us. I don't want too many neighbors."

This little path rambled and twisted, finally reaching the northwest corner of "The Crags" enclosure.

"Why, there are roses here, too!" exclaimed Nancy delightedly, catching a glint of scarlet

along the side fence. "Oh, and white iris! Mother never told me! Oh, and ——"

With one of her impulsive little dashes, Nancy ran forward and up three steps into the quaintest, dearest little summer-house imaginable. The stone steps were half hidden by the bay and sweet fern bushes that grew close around them. The posts that supported the roof were all but two of them live tree trunks, the rustic railing between the posts was twined with clematis vines or masked in shrubbery, and the arched roof was so cunningly hidden under the canopy of green boughs that branched from the side pillars that you couldn't see it at all until you actually stood beneath it.

"What an adorable summer-house!" cried Nancy. "Just like a ——"

There facing her against a pillar was fastened a sign in raised gray letters stuck on a mossy plank: "The Birdcage."

"Why, it's exactly like a birdcage!" cried Nancy delightedly. "Even Jane Learned couldn't have found a better name for it."

A curving seat was built between two of the pillars. Between two others stood a small table, with a chest underneath it—a fascinating little chest made of white birch slabs. And it must hold something valuable, for it was securely padlocked.

There were also two armchairs, in rustic style like all the rest of the furnishings. Nancy tried them both, and decided that, with cushions to pad the rather ridgy effect of the slab seats, they would be the height of comfort. One even had an adjustable back, like father's Morris chair.

The little house was perched just above the rocky beach, in the very corner of the Lees' land. Beyond, the ground fell sharply away on two sides, giving the Birdcage the effect of being hung very high up among the trees. Nancy drew an armchair close to the railing on the ocean side, and lay back in it to get the effect. In a minute voices just below her made her jump. Leaning cautiously forward, she could see two girls, one of whom she had met at the Inn last summer, clambering over the rocks beyond the fence. The vacant lot had very nice rocks along its water-front. Nancy had often climbed about on them before she had rocks of her own.

Cautiously Nancy moved back from the railing. "I'd rather keep the Birdcage a secret," she thought. "I never noticed it from down there, but perhaps you can see it, if you know where to look. I'll investigate, but not now, because that girl might ask me what I was looking for. To think that nobody told me about our Birdcage!"

Back to the house sped Nancy.

"Mother, why didn't you tell me about the Birdcage?" she demanded, tumbling up the piazza steps.

Just outside the living-room door the table was spread for breakfast, and mother sat there in lonely state, eating a delicious-looking melon.

"It's long after breakfast time," she said, surveying her rumpled daughter rather critically. "I sent Rosa to the boat-house to tell you that the others had eaten before they started; but she couldn't find you."

"I must have been at the tennis-court or in the Birdcage. I'm sorry I forgot breakfast," said Nancy, slipping into her seat.

"And what is the Birdcage?" asked mother.

Nancy jumped up again. "Then you haven't seen it? Nobody's found it but me? Oh, come and let me show you! Oh, I'm so glad I've had a chance to discover one of our lovely new belongings for myself."

"Yes, dear. I'll see it after breakfast."

Nancy sank back shamefacedly into her chair. It was silly to get so excited about beautiful things. But mother hadn't seen it,—didn't know how pretty it was nor how wonderful white irises can be growing against a tangle of roses that clamber over a rustic fence, with a Birdcage beside them.

When Nancy mentioned the flowers, even mother got a little excited.

"Miss Willis told me that she had started a garden, but I haven't found anything but the beds around the house, so I've had more laid out up here. I prefer my flowers where I can see them all the time."

"Oh, mother!" Nancy had had an exciting idea. "You have your own piazza, and father and Dick have the boat and the boat-house. Could I have the Birdcage for mine? I'd like to make green cushions for the seats, and have a green jar for flowers on the little table, and—oh, fix it all up just as I want to. Of course," added Nancy hastily, "you could all go there just the same. Only Bill and Joe mustn't muss it all up, nor bother when the girls come to see me, and we want to sit out there and talk."

"I think you might have the Birdcage for your special plaything, Nancy," promised mother, "unless your father has designs on it, and I'm quite sure he knows nothing at all about it. I remember there was a key on the bunch Miss Willis turned over to us marked 'Birdcage.' Has your fascinating little house a door?"

"Oh, that must be the key to the birch-bark chest!" cried Nancy joyously. "I'm so glad it's not lost!" And she explained about the white

birch box under the table. "We can open it when you go out with me, can't we? What do you suppose is inside?"

"Bird-seed, perhaps," suggested mother gaily.

But it wasn't exactly bird-seed that they found in the chest,—though Nancy said that mother's guess was warm, since this birdcage was for human birds, and tea is about as near as you can come to human bird-seed. There was a cannister of tea in the chest—a very festive, flower-painted cannister. There were also six gray-green cups and six saucers of Japanese china, six little wooden spoons,—stirring spoons, Nancy called them, since they were certainly too small for any other purpose,—a squatty pot, a sugar-bowl, a pitcher, and a plate, all gray-green like the cups, with a tiny wooden fork lying on the plate.

They puzzled over the fork for some time, until Mrs. Lee had an inspiration; of course it was for the lemon.

Nancy arranged the tea-set on the table, and admired it in her usual enthusiastic fashion.

"To think how often we had tea with Miss Willis, and she never let us have it here!" she sighed.

"This was her own little private nook, I fancy," said Mrs. Lee. "Miss Willis is a very famous artist, you know, daughter. She probably wanted to

keep one place all to herself, as I'm keeping my private piazza."

Nancy nodded. "Yes, that's it. It was too precious to show to anybody, except perhaps her very dearest friends. I think I should like to keep it rather secret too, mother—just for us and our best friends. Is the china surely ours? Miss Willis didn't forget to take it away with her?"

Yes, it was surely theirs, Mrs. Lee said; the sale of "The Crags" had included nearly all the furnishings.

So the Birdcage tea-set was repacked in its chest and carefully locked in by Nancy, who proudly accepted the custodianship of the key from mother.

Mrs. Lee promised to write at once for cushions and samples of gray-green covering, after which there was really nothing more to do about the Birdcage. So Nancy unpacked, forcing herself to keep at the unwelcome task until all her belongings were in apple-pie order. Then, the fishing-party, arriving home in a state of ravenous anxiety for luncheon, duly wondered at and admired Nancy's find; and Mr. Lee laughingly assured her that in their family finding was keeping—when mother said so. In the afternoon Dick and his father went off sailing again, the younger children vanished on mysterious business of their own,

Mrs. Lee settled herself on the piazza with a book and some sewing, and Nancy, after her rapturous morning, was suddenly and fiercely assailed by that desolate, lost feeling that comes sometimes in the wake of raptures.

She tried to read, started to go to the post-office with the letter about the cushions, and decided that it was foolish to walk so far when the mail-man would be along soon. She found the piazza sunny, the house stuffy, the Birdcage lonely. And so at last she burst out upon her mother with the question about Timmy: "What do you suppose he's doing now?" followed by her plaintive wail, "I just can't settle down to anything!"

"You miss Timmy and all your Fair Oaks friends, don't you?" mother returned sympathetically. "Dick will be back soon, I think, for some tennis."

"Did I tell you about Timmy's naming-party, mother?" demanded Nancy.

"Yes, dear, you did. I'm almost afraid you've told me all about him. Why don't you go down to the Inn? The Minots have come, I think, and ——"

"Oh, Louise Minot wouldn't care about—I mean I think I won't to-day, mother."

Mother smiled again with the perfect understanding she could always be relied upon for.

"If I were you, I should write it all down in your Red Journal, Nancy, all about your wonderful baby and his trip home."

"Oh, I have, every night, so I wouldn't forget anything,—not any least little thing. I promised the Learned twins ——"

"Then go and write to them," advised Mrs. Lee briskly.

"Yes, mother. I'll mail your letter with mine. Mine won't be ready for the postman; it will be most awfully long." Complete satisfaction in her voice, Nancy was off.

"DEAR TWINS:

"Pine Ridge is the homeliest place you ever saw or dreamed of. If Timmy grows up there, he certainly won't learn to be extravagant, because there's nothing to spend money for. The stores are too little and funny for anything. There isn't even a soda fountain.

"John Smith is six feet and four inches tall and has nine children and four grandchildren. One, he says, is a caution, and one he's never seen. He lives in New York most of the time, and has interests in Pine Ridge. That means he owns a lot of timber and all the mills at Camp Sixty-Nine are his. He is the funniest, most excitable old gentleman. He liked Jeanne best, because she let

him talk at her in torrents, just saying 'yes' and 'no' in her sweet little voice, instead of pouring questions at him, as Margaret and I did. He perfectly hates questions. He shakes his finger at you and says, 'One moment, madam, one moment! We shall come to that directly!' At least he said 'madam' to Miss Dutton and Lloyd, because she only interrupted once, perhaps. To Margaret and me he said 'child.'

"But he made up by loving Timmy like one of his own grandchildren, if not more so, and he saw to everything for us splendidly. He must be pretty rich, and we're rather afraid that he'll want to steal Timmy's education and so on away from Fair Oaks. We didn't dare to ask him, because he hates questions so.

"The Rafterys are comical, too. Patrick is a little wiry, red-haired man, with freckles, a turned-up nose, and a smile that won't come off and spills over on to everybody else. They keep him in spite of his laziness, because he makes everybody good-natured, and so things always run smoothly at Camp Sixty-Nine. He hugged Timmy till I thought the poor child would be smothered; but he wasn't, and he seemed to like it. Mrs. Raftery didn't say much. I almost thought she didn't care, until I happened to see that her eyes were full of tears. She knows all about babies.

That Mrs. Sefton had her taught at a school in St. Louis, and she took care of three Sefton children, all delicate. Of course she's busy, because she does the cooking and housekeeping for twenty-five men; but she is the kind that can fit things in and get a lot done in a few minutes. She seemed just like the mothers of great men that you read about—Abraham Lincoln's, I mean particularly. Margaret noticed that, and Miss Dutton thought so too.

"If I were you, Jane, of course I could tell a romantic story of our trip; but being just Nancy Lee, I can only say that Timmy's favorite block was lost the first time we changed cars—no, not by me, so don't make hateful remarks. After that he *would* cry some, and I do think it was fortunate that I went along to pacify him. Getting there was terribly exciting of course, and saying good-bye was agonizing, especially as Timmy wouldn't even look at me, he was so busy pulling his father's red hair. Of course I want him to be happy and contented in his own home, but it was pretty hard to be ignored like that. Such is life, I guess. Miss Dutton's friend, Mrs. Watson, is as sweet as she can be, though she doesn't know a thing about babies. She invited us all to come out next summer and visit her and find out for ourselves about Timmy. I don't suppose I can

go, but maybe Margaret or Lloyd can stop on their way West.

"Now I am at home and we have a new house with a lovely yard, big enough to get lost in, as I did when I was exploring it this morning, a tennis-court tucked away among the shrubbery, *and* a Birdcage! You can guess all you like about that until you come to see it for yourselves, which I hope you can soon."

Nancy's busy pen which had been fairly flying over the paper wavered and stopped.

"I must ask mother before I invite them," she decided swiftly. "I'm afraid I almost asked them to come when we said good-bye, but writing it down would settle it. I do hope mother isn't feeling too tired to have company."

The piazza, when Nancy rushed down to it from her room, where she had been writing at the cedar-tree window, was quite empty. Mother's book lay beside her work-basket on the wicker table. "She didn't come in for a hat," reflected Nancy, "so she can't be far off. I'll ask Rosa if she saw where mother went. I do want to mail my letter before dinner."

But Rosa, who was shelling peas behind the lattice that divided her piazza from the family's, knew nothing of her mistress's whereabouts.

Nancy felt that she should not have a moment's peace until the all-important matter of the twins' visit was settled. But Mrs. Lee was not down on the rocks, nor could she be seen on Lighthouse Road, which ran straight as an arrow for a long way on either side of "The Crags" gateway. She might be calling next door, but Nancy fancied she would have dressed up, at least to the extent of hat and gloves, for a first call. She might be hunting Bill and Joe; in which case, as Nancy hadn't heard them say where they were going, she might be anywhere on Halcyon Point. Nancy considered; it was rather a hopeless quest.

"When I have to hunt for them blind, I always try Baxter's Reef," she mused, "and they're generally somewhere on it. I believe I'll go there anyhow," she decided swiftly, and turned off the main road on to a grassy lane that led away from the bay, past one side of Fresh Pond, and right across the Point to the broad ocean.

Swinging along on the familiar road, away from the delightful strangeness of the new house, Nancy suddenly felt at home again in Halycon. Just beyond the turn she met two girls and a very tall boy strolling along single-file in a rather bored way. If she had been sure that they were the ones who belonged next door, Nancy would have invited them to join her in exploring Baxter's

Reef. She loved showing off the charms of Halcyon to newcomers.

A minute later she noticed a flag flying from the pole at Gray Gables. "Gray Gables" was Halycon's show-place. The estate occupied a big triangle where three of the Point roads intersected, and from its commanding position the great stone house overlooked the whole summer colony. It had been closed for years, but to-day the fluttering flag certainly suggested tenants. Yes, a motor was chugging impatiently at the carriage entrance.

"More new people to find out about!" exulted Nancy. "I hope it's a nice jolly family our ages. I wonder if mother or Dick have discovered who they are."

All Nancy's habitual interest in everything and everybody around her had returned. She ran down to Fresh Pond to admire the water-lilies, and finding one alluringly near the bank, almost fell in trying to pluck it. She made a detour to inspect two new houses that had been barely begun the fall before. People were living in one of them now—more possibilities. She stopped to exchange enthusiastic greetings with an Inn girl she had played tennis with once or twice, a year ago. Hidden behind a tall hedge, she watched the two funny little old maids, who lived in the tiny white cottage beyond Fresh Pond, start out for their

daily constitutional with Ginger, their big tiger cat, tagging at their heels.

Finally a short-cut across the moor brought her out on Surf Road just opposite the looming pile of Baxter's Reef. Nothing to be seen of Bill and Joe or of mother; but Nancy didn't care. The sea was so blue and sparkly, with white crests of foam breaking along the shore. The Reef was so big and splendid, the tide-pools so inviting. Nancy drew a long breath and started down the bank to the stone causeway, the natural bridge that led out from the beach to Baxter's. Gaily she skipped from stone to stone, stopping now and then to choose her way. Oh, it was good to be alive, to be young, to tramp, to climb, to be out in the sun and the wind, to smell the sea! It was going to be a splendid, splendid summer! Nancy's last jump landed her at the foot of the great rock. Sure-footed as a goat in her rubber-soled shoes, she ran up the steep side of the cliff and stood exultant on the topmost crag, drinking in the beauty of sea and shore and moorland.

"Nobody else out here, I'm glad to say. I love to have it all to myself!" Nancy danced out on the rock's projecting nose and curled up in her favorite seat on a narrow shelf above a big tide-pool, full of waving seaweed.

Yes, it was going to be a splendid summer, with

the new house to enjoy, mother to help, Dick to be company for, new friendships to make and old ones to strengthen. All summers at Halcyon were pleasant, but this one ——

"*Is* that a sea-anemone?" demanded Nancy aloud, squinting at a pinky-white object in the bottom of the pool below her, and promptly she slid down to investigate.

CHAPTER II

EVERYTHING'S SPOILED!

"WHU-WHU! How do I get down there where you are?"

It was a sea-anemone that Nancy's sharp eyes had discovered on the edge of her favorite tide-pool: a lovely big, pinky-white anemone, and beside it were two baby ones, deep orange and pale violet respectively. Nancy rolled up her sleeve and stuck her hand into the water, touching the queer flower-like tentacles gently, watching them curl up tight as they scented danger, and slowly unfold again when nothing disastrous happened. Anemones were getting very rare at Halcyon. Nancy resolved not to show this cluster to Bill and Joe, who, with the best intentions, might handle the dainty things too roughly.

And then, at the call from above, Nancy stood up swiftly, frowning a little at this summary invasion of her happy privacy. Far up on the top of the big pile of rock stood a girl about Nancy's age—a little brown gypsy thing, in a tan linen dress, the skirt of which fluttered and flapped

around her in the sea-wind. Her sandy hair blew too, right across her face, so that she looked all one color, as if she had been fashioned out of the great brown rock on which she stood. Nancy was sure that she had never seen the girl before, and she felt a little annoyed at the stranger's calm assumption that she was wanted down below. Still, if she was new to Halcyon and to the joys of Baxter's Reef, and if she wanted to go out as far as one could but wasn't very good at exploring rocks, Nancy was only too glad to help her.

"Are your shoes rubber-soled?" she called up to the interloper.

"No, they're not," sang back the girl. "And they slip fearfully."

"Then you'd better go round to your right and come down by the crevice you'll see there," advised Nancy. "I'll meet you at the bottom and show you how I got out here."

"But I shan't show her the anemones!" added Nancy to herself, running easily up the curving back of the cliff to the place where the crevice, with its footholds and its walls to steady oneself by, ended. The strange girl was there before her.

"Jump across to where I am," advised Nancy, stretching out her hand.

"Oh, thank you!" panted the other girl, landing lightly beside Nancy and swaying a little to

get her balance. "Isn't this the loveliest place? I hope you didn't mind my calling down to you, but you see I've only a minute to stay, and I felt as if I *must*, simply *must* get down to the very tip end of things! I could have found the way myself, but I hadn't the time to poke around."

As she spoke, she pushed the sandy locks back from her freckled brown face and turned it toward Nancy, and then Nancy saw that the strange girl's eyes were brown too, and that they were the biggest, brightest, most beautiful eyes that she had ever seen. They flamed with life, they danced with happiness, and their sparkling, flashing radiance called to Nancy as plainly as if the words had been shouted in her ear. "Let's be happy together!" said those bright, brown eyes. "I like you, and you'll like me. Isn't this a wonderful, beautiful world!"

Without an instant's hesitation Nancy answered the eyes. "If you can't stay long, come first and look at some sea-anemones that I've just discovered, and then perhaps we can find starfish out in that biggest pool. But the anemones are much rarer."

"Oh, I never hoped to see anything half so lovely!" sighed the strange girl, creeping after Nancy down to the favorite pool. "Oh, the dears!" The wonderful eyes grew softer and brighter. "May I really touch them? I've

never been to the seashore before, you see, and I find it all so fascinating. I suppose you come every summer and can wander all day long on the rocks."

Nancy explained her status at Halcyon, pointing out the location of "The Crags" and adding her name.

"Mine is Hope Haskins," the little brown girl explained in her turn. "I live in Vermont at a place called Sherwin Corners. It's not really a town, just a few houses. And here, I'm at the Inn, waiting on table. I just love being here!" The brown eyes flamed into sudden rapture. "I love the sea, and the Inn is so pretty, and the ladies who stay there wear such lovely clothes. And I think I'm going to like being at 'The Sign of the Dolphin' almost the best of all."

"What is it that you like best?" asked Nancy curiously.

"Oh, don't you know?" The eyes were pools of rapture. "Then I can help by telling you, and that will repay Miss Willis for letting me off early to-day. People have to know about it, you see—lots of people—or it won't be a success. 'The Sign of the Dolphin' is a shop where you can have tea and buy all sorts of pretty things. It's over the other side of the golf course, and there are signs along the road to help you find it. Will

you come there soon, and will you tell your friends to come? It's a sweet little shop."

Nancy promised. "When are you there? I'd rather come then."

"Oh, thank you for that!" cried Hope Haskins joyously. "I'm there Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday afternoons, from two until almost five. Those are my afternoons off at the Inn, you see. I have to be back by five to set my tables, but it only takes a minute to go, if you run."

"But if you work at this shop on your afternoons off, when can you come out on the rocks?" inquired Nancy earnestly. "Do you have some mornings off too?"

The brown eyes grew sorrowful. "Oh, no, mornings are fearfully busy. I can come just at odd times like this, and on one whole Sunday a month. I'm praying that it won't rain on any of my Sundays. I did hate to give up the afternoons, but you see there's all that extra money. I want the extra money more than anything."

"Oh, yes," said Nancy vaguely, not knowing what else to say without appearing either indifferent or curious.

"For college, you know," explained Hope, her eyes flaming again with eagerness. "With the extra money from Miss Willis I'm almost sure that I can go this fall. Oh, I'm afraid I've talked

to you too long! I mustn't be late back, because that wouldn't be fair."

Nancy consulted her wrist-watch. "You can get to the Inn by five, if you hurry a little. I'll show you the easiest way back to the road. And some day I hope we can have another talk."

"Really? Oh, thank you for that!" The brown eyes danced with delight. "And you mustn't pity me too much for having to hurry home. Each time that I have to rush away from the moor and the rocks, after just a tantalizing glimpse of them—like to-day—I console myself by thinking how much more I love it all than I should, maybe, if I could stay as long as I liked and see everything that I want to. Now,"—she waved back at the Reef,—"I feel as if I'd left all sorts of beautiful mysteries behind."

"I should just feel as if I wanted dreadfully to stay longer," said practical Nancy.

"Oh, then you don't understand!" Hope faced her firmly. "It's like—why, it's like this little glimpse we two have had of each other. We've very likely had a much better time—a more *thrilling* time—because it's been so short, and because we've left so much over. You think, maybe, that you haven't discovered all the things in me that you'd like, and I'm sure I haven't in you."

"Oh, so am I sure about you," declared Nancy

earnestly, smiling straight into the glad brown eyes.

The causeway in sight, Hope held out her little brown hand in farewell. "I'm all right now. Don't you waste a minute more away from the pools and the spray. And do come soon to 'The Sign of the Dolphin.'"

Nancy watched the little figure hopping from stone to stone on its way to the mainland, swaying and slipping uncertainly because of the smooth-soled shoes. A nondescript little figure, rather dumpy and altogether without distinction, until you saw those shining eyes. Nancy considered; this was Tuesday; on Thursday she would go to "The Sign of the Dolphin." Meanwhile, it looked rather bleak and lonely out on the Reef, and yet she longed for one last look at the anemones. The tide was rising now, and the spray dashed up gloriously against the lower rocks of the Reef. Nancy lingered on and on, for just one more big wave, and then for just one more.

Compared to their other house, "The Crags" was no distance at all from Baxter's; but when Nancy finally turned a resolute back on the fascinating surf, dinner time was perilously near, and the causeway, which at high tide was often impassable, was getting very watery indeed. Who cared? Wet rocks and slimy seaweed had no

"I'M ALL RIGHT NOW"

terrors for rubber-shod climbers, particularly if they also possessed Nancy Lee's happy-go-lucky nature. However, that very big pool spreading across the middle of the causeway must be somehow avoided. Her eyes far ahead of her steps, her hungry thoughts on dinner, with a tennis match to follow, and perhaps an evening call on the girls next door,—who wouldn't be half so fascinating as brown-eyed Hope Haskins,—Nancy Lee stubbed her toe as she started down the last steep pitch from the Reef to the causeway level, lost her balance, careered down over a dampish, slippery stone, and landed in a shaken, bunchy heap on a patch of wet sand.

"Clumsy!" Nancy apostrophized herself, disentangling her muddied shirts from around her feet. "O-ouch!"

Instead of scrambling up as she intended, Nancy sank back again, this time in a very abject, white-faced, frightened heap indeed. After a minute's rest, she hitched alongside a big stone, and hanging to it with both hands tried again to stand up. But before she had fairly pulled herself erect, she sat abruptly back on the big stone.

"I've done it now!" said Nancy Lee to the rocks, the sea, and the distant moorland.

A little wave plopped saucily up over the soft sand at Nancy's feet.

"In a minute I shall be all right," Nancy Lee announced loudly to the dusking landscape. Saying this made her feel as if it might be true, and she certainly needed all possible aid toward keeping up her courage and ignoring a horrid, sickening pain in her right ankle. This pain made her feel rather faint, so she bent forward a little, as she had been taught one should do under such circumstances at the First Aid classes held by Timmy's nurse at Fair Oaks School, and clutched hard at the rock she was sitting on. Hanging on tight had not been mentioned in the First Aid classes, but it certainly did help you not to want to cry out.

"Somebody will be along in a few minutes," declared Nancy Lee with assurance. "Surf Road is always full of people on a lovely day like this. I could walk if somebody would just help me a little about starting."

Except when Nancy Lee broke it to soliloquize, the silence of Baxter's Reef was oppressive. The wind was sinking with the sun, and the roar of the surf had softened to a padding thud. But the tide was rising fast. As a matter of course now, the waves splashed softly over the strip of sand around Nancy's seat. She hitched along on her rock and managed to find a dry niche half-way up it for her feet to rest on. Where were all the people who ought to be out walking or driving in the cool

of the afternoon? A crowd of them must come in sight in a minute.

"They'll be sure to hear me over on the road," Nancy assured herself earnestly. "It's not far across—only I should like to get over there while the going's good, as Dick says. This tide——" She broke off to call loudly as a motor whizzed unexpectedly by on the road; but its occupants paid not the slightest heed to Nancy's shouting.

"Next time I'll call 'Help,'" she decided, and she did, but what with the sea, now getting noisy again, the chug of the motor, and their own gay talk and laughter, this motor party, too, heard nothing.

Then two women strolled past along the road, and again Nancy's cry for help went unregarded. The road was really a long way off, with high bushes edging the bank that dropped off toward the Reef; and the wind was wrong.

"If I can't walk, I've just got to crawl," declaimed Nancy rather shakily, and set about doing it. If she could get to the road before dark, some rescuer would surely appear!

Crawling over wet rocks is a slow and absorbing process. Nancy kept at it for some minutes, till her skirts were wringing wet and her knees much the worse for wear, while the road was not appreciably nearer. In trying to stand up and

pick the best way around the pool that had flooded the middle of the causeway, she wrenched her bad ankle painfully. When she sat down again to rest it, a big salt tear splashed down to join a big wave, which caught Nancy unprepared and soaked her to her waist. With a sudden realization that her plight was really serious, Nancy picked up a piece of driftwood to use as a cane and in spite of the almost unbearable pain it cost her, limped forward toward the mainland. Her head down the better to breast the waves, her senses dulled by the throbbing pain, her mind intent on one thing—to get beyond the reach of this black, rushing water that deepened around her every minute—she neither saw nor heard the approach of a fellow-traveler.

A boy had turned off the shore road and paused a moment on the Reef path to stare down at the half inundated causeway. Then, whistling gaily, he ran briskly forward to the water's edge and began a reckless, tumultuous progress, marked by leaps and bounds that carried him dry-shod along the watery pathway, his only pauses being just the length of a swiftly appraising glance to measure the direction of the big reef.

Just before he reached Nancy, his foot set a loose stone noisily flying, and Nancy, straightening laboriously, saw him coming.

"Oh!" she cried, in an involuntary sigh of relief.

Her exclamation gave the sure-footed boy such a start that he lost his footing and stumbled ignominiously into the big pool, whence he stood, knee-deep in the water and hatless, staring amazedly at the rumpled, soaked, wind-blown, white-faced girl, hanging desperately to a weather-worn stick of wood and staring forlornly back at him from behind a tangle of damp yellow curls.

For a minute the two stared in amazed silence. Then, "Pardon me!" said the boy, who was a pleasant-faced, manly-looking fellow about Dick's age; and blushing furiously at having, as he would have expressed it, "run down" a strange girl, he stooped for his cap, flicked the water off the rough green cloth, jammed it back on his bare head, and started off again faster than ever.

"Oh, please!" begged Nancy swiftly, "oh, please will you help me a little? I've hurt my ankle and I'm trying to get back to the road. It's awfully hard work going over these wet stones."

Without hesitation the boy wheeled, and blushing harder than ever faced Nancy. "What a mess!" he said cheerfully. He pulled off his wet cap, shook it again, and then carefully wiped off a tiny green feather that was stuck in the band. "Crickets!" He surveyed the darkening landscape anxiously. "There's nobody else you can

ask, is there? You see I—it's not that I wouldn't be glad to help you, only there's a reason why I—prefer that you'd ask some one else."

"But how can I?" demanded Nancy desperately. "Nobody else came. Nobody up on the road heard." Pride suddenly overwhelmed her. "But I can go on alone perfectly well," she assured him coldly. "Please don't trouble. Please go on to wherever you were going."

"Shucks!" said the boy. "Of course I'll help you back. I only thought—I only meant —— But as it is, I'm bound to help you. Nobody could expect me not to. Oh, I knew we couldn't keep it up! We're not the kind to keep it up."

"What did you say?" asked Nancy, a little frightened at his incoherence. "I don't believe I understood."

"Oh, I was only talking to myself," explained the boy with a sigh. "I've got the habit lately." He smiled a friendly smile at Nancy. "Now, how am I to help?" he demanded, once more putting on the damp green cap and facing her with businesslike alertness.

"Oh, not at all, please," begged Nancy who, having prepared to swallow her pride, was now remembering all mother's warnings against speaking to strange men. This boy looked nice, but his talk was certainly queer and rambling. "Please

go on," she besought him earnestly, trying not to act as frightened and miserable as she felt.

"Oh, shucks!" repeated the boy pleasantly. "You mustn't mind what I said. Of course I want to help you, and I'm going to, too. Only I can't without talking to you, and that's—well, I simply can't explain. But I'll tell you one thing. At high tide this is going to be a very wet spot, and high tide isn't far off. The longer we delay, the worse everything will get—everything, including your ankle," he concluded with decision. "So we'd better just get started."

"All right," agreed Nancy weakly.

The boy nodded approval. "Now how shall we work it? Take my arm, so. No, I'd better take your arm. Try putting a hand on my shoulder. Then, if I steady you, you can sort of hop along, mostly on your well foot. We can't bother about keeping entirely out of the water, I'm afraid. I say, I'll bet that foot hurts you pretty badly. Whenever you want to rest, just say so."

They made the road in three laps, as the boy called the three stages of the journey between halts for rest. And when they had climbed the path, and Nancy was sitting down once more, this time on a comfortable dry stone by the side of Surf Road, the boy, looking back, announced that

the water was at least waist-high out where he and Nancy had joined forces.

"So I shan't go back there to-night, thank you," he announced cheerfully. "I'd planned to get out just before high tide and come back by the light of my trusty lantern"—he displayed a tiny electric "bug-light"—"about nine o'clock. I liked the idea of being caught by the tide after dark—on purpose."

"I'm sorry ——" began Nancy.

"Shucks! I can do it just as well to-morrow, can't I?" broke in the boy. "Now where do you live?"

Nancy explained. "If you'd just telephone my family when you get home, I should be very grateful to you. I don't believe I can walk any farther, and besides, I don't wish to trouble you any more than I've had to already." Nancy tried to combine dignity with gratitude.

"Very well," said the boy briskly. "If that's what you want, I'll do it. I hope you're not laid up for long with your sprain. Good-bye." Suddenly he wheeled and came back to Nancy. "Sure you're not afraid to stay alone?" he demanded. "It's getting sort of dusky. You'd better keep my bug-light in case of accidents."

"Oh, no," demurred Nancy. "They won't be long coming. I'm all right, truly I am."

"Just the same, I'll bet that ankle is aching like a house afire. If you weren't an awfully good sport, you'd be weeping or fainting away or some other such girl's doings. I say,—your idea's no go. I'm going to do this the quickest way I can, to suit myself. I won't be a minute."

Too faint and dizzy to care what he meant or to notice which way he was going, Nancy sat on her stone in a daze of frightened, throbbing misery. Nobody came by; nothing happened; surely it was ages and ages and ages, as little Sarah used to say at school, before there was a brisk hail down the road, and the boy turned a curveting bay horse, hitched to a trim road-cart, up to Nancy's stone.

"There! How's this for a hurry call?" he demanded triumphantly. Evidently he thought, poor fellow, that he had been quick! "You see," he went on, "we live so near, and I knew Lady'd be all hitched in, ready to go to town for the evening papers, so I disregarded your suggestion—that is, I had your family notified that you'd be along in a few minutes. Hope you don't mind my coming back for you. Lady's pretty fresh. I'm afraid you'll have to climb in somehow, while I try to hold her quiet. Oh, I'll bet that hurt!" as a sudden side-step of Lady's threw Nancy hard down on the lame ankle. "But it's all plain sailing now. Where do you live? Yes, 'The Crags';

but remember I don't know where anything is here. Just tell me which turns to make, as we come to them. I am certainly sorry that Lady jumped at the wrong minute. Now please to keep on being the best sport ever, and don't faint or anything like that, till I get you home."

Mr. Lee was standing in the gate of "The Crags" watching for them. Nancy smiled at him faintly. "If you could help me out! I've done something——"

"You'd better just carry her in," advised the boy calmly. "She's been very plucky, but she's about done for now."

Mrs. Lee came out to thank Nancy's rescuer. "It was very kind of you to bring my daughter home, and you were very thoughtful to prepare us for her arrival. I suppose you're one of my boy Dick's friends. I'm very bad at remembering faces."

The boy stared non-committally back at her. "No," he said, "I'm a stranger here. I just happened to be around. I—got into it that way. And now I must be going. They'll want Lady. And besides——"

"Come and see us," Mrs. Lee urged hospitably, as the bay horse started. "We're very grateful. Won't you tell me your——"

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure," cut in the boy curtly, and off he went at a smart trot.

"Crickets! I knew we'd never pull it off," he muttered as he whirled into the crossroad. "I told her we weren't cut out for hermits. What a mess! Well, I certainly couldn't help it. I never can. Neither can she. That's the whole trouble." And he lapsed into gloomy silence.

"It's a very bad sprain. You'll be laid up for some time, young woman," said the doctor unfeelingly, giving Nancy's ankle a final pat and picking up his medicine-bag.

"How long is some time?" demanded Nancy tremulously.

"Oh, a month or six weeks, I should say. Good-night. I'll look in to-morrow."

Nancy didn't want any dinner. She didn't feel like talking. She refused mother's suggestion about reading aloud. The Red Journal was on the table by her bed. She reached for it, dated a new page, and straight across it in a bold hand she wrote:

"Everything's spoiled.—N. LEE."

All through a sleepless, feverish, tossing, miserable night she kept saying it over to herself: "Everything's spoiled, spoiled, spoiled. My lovely summer, all the things I'd planned, all my helping mother, all my fun, the twins' visit,—spoiled, spoiled, spoiled. Everything's spoiled!"

CHAPTER III

"YOU BE ON THE LOOKOUT!"

THE little brown bird, singing gaily in Nancy's cedar-tree, roused her from a troubled nap the next morning. Such a gorgeous day! Father and Dick were down on the piazza already, eating an early breakfast before their morning fishing trip. Bouncings and bumpings from Josephine's room announced that that noisy young lady was hurrying through her toilette, preparatory to joining the sailors. Something was on Nancy's mind—a vague weight of unhappiness left, perhaps, from a bad dream. Something disagreeable seemed to be hanging over her. It couldn't be anything real—— Oh, but it was! Nancy buried her hot face in her hot pillow and wept. That was how mother found her, when she came up with breakfast and a bunch of dewy white irises, as lovely as orchids, from the Birdcage bed.

"I c-can't help it!" sobbed Nancy. "I c-can't stand it to stick around here for s-s-six weeks! No, my ankle doesn't h-h-h-urt at all. I know I could walk on it. That doctor isn't any good at

all! Oh, mother, I never was so unhappy in my whole life!"

Mother consoled and sympathized, and finally resorted to a gentle scolding, which dried Nancy's tears and left her silent, sulky, and unresponsive. No, she did not want the Spoiled Kitten on the bed with her. The collie must be sent outdoors, where he belonged. Of course Dick was not to give up his sailing lesson with Captain Baker to stay and teach her a new solitaire. She hated solitaire, and Bill and Joe chattered and ran about so that they tired her head. The doctor came, and at sight of him Nancy wept afresh, whereupon he patted her shoulder comfortingly, and promised to send out a nurse to bathe and rub and bandage the injured ankle.

Under any other circumstances Nancy would have been tremendously interested in Nurse Marston, who came from Nova Scotia, looked adorably pretty in her starched blue and white uniform, and was very jolly and talkative, prepared to amuse her sad young patient with merry badinage or romantic tales of Evangeline's land, according to taste. But Nancy received jokes and stories alike in glum, forbidding silence, and Nurse Marston, being very young and not particularly patient, privately decided that her charge was extremely ill-tempered, and after the first

few visits confined her ministrations strictly to bathing, rubbing, and bandaging, according to orders.

"Suppose I ask Louise Minot to come and see you," suggested mother on the fourth day of Nancy's captivity.

Mr. Lee had left for home that morning, and before his departure he had summoned Dick, William, and Josephine to the Birdcage for a fatherly talk. They must remember, he urged, that their mother was quite worn out already, and they must help her in any way they could. It was not Nancy's fault that instead of being a help she was an added burden on mother's shoulders. The others, and particularly Dick, who was the man of the house in his father's absence, must see to it that this burden should rest as lightly as possible. It was their business, not mother's, to entertain Nancy. They must divide up the time, sacrificing some pleasures, and trying hard to make the days shorter for poor Nancy, and as full as possible of rest and recreation for mother. Otherwise,—Mr. Lee shook his head soberly.

"We couldn't get on without mother," he said. "We must all look out for her in every possible way. Nancy feels this. It accounts for her being so blue—the regret that she can't offer the help that mother had hoped for from her."

"Nancy said she cried 'cause she can't play tennis," interposed the accurate Josephine.

"Oh, well, girls cry about lots of things," announced conciliatory William. "But we'll amuse her. Maybe mother'll let us sit up longer, now we've got to help."

As a result of this family conference, Josephine had nobly deprived herself of seeing her father off at the station, and now, after luncheon, Dick was taking his turn, trying hard to keep his mind on cribbage, while his eyes wandered off to the sparkly waters of the bay. They were having yacht races out there, and Captain Baker had promised to take Dick out to see the finish. Perhaps, if Billy remembered to come back for his turn, promptly at four ——

"Your game," said Dick briskly, as if he had no thoughts for anything beyond the cribbage board. "And that finishes the rubber of rubbers. If you did want to see Louise Minot, Sis, I could leave word at the Inn when I go down to the captain's wharf."

"I don't. She's no fun," said sulky Nancy.

Mother and Dick exchanged discouraged glances.

"Suppose I went to call next door, and asked the girls there to come over?" suggested Mrs. Lee pleasantly. "They're strangers, and I think they'd enjoy ——"

Nancy shook her curly head. "No. I couldn't think of anything to say to strange girls. Besides, it's hot and stuffy up here. They'd hate having to be indoors. I met Charlotte Carter yesterday and she told me their names: Alexandra and Cecilia. They sound awfully fussy and stuck up."

"They look jolly," said Dick, his longing eyes fixed on the rippling sea.

"Well, I don't want them." Nancy's lips set in a disagreeable line. "I don't want anybody."

"I'll tell you what," suggested Dick, spurred on to tremendous efforts by the sight of the discouraged droop of mother's shoulders. "I know what'll amuse you,—as soon as your crutches come, and you can hop down-stairs. I'll hunt up the Green Knight and see if I can't get him over here for tennis, followed by a polite call on the invalid."

"The Green Knight?" queried Nancy listlessly.

"Father called your rescuer that," explained mother. "Don't you remember I told you how he ran off without even giving us his name? So we christened him after his green cap, with the tiny green feather in it." She turned to Dick. "I wish you would hunt him up, son. I want to thank him a little more formally for all his kindness. I can't bear to think of what might have happened if he hadn't come along when he did."

"He certainly was the queerest boy," said Nancy, just a little interested at last. "He said such funny things, and then he wouldn't explain them."

"Not all there, maybe," suggested Dick, tapping his forehead significantly.

"Oh, Dick!" Nancy was quite indignant. "He was as bright as—as you are, and a splendid climber, and most of the time he was talkative and jolly. He couldn't have been nicer, except just at first. I told you what he said as nearly as I could remember."

Dick nodded. "Well, he was queer again just at the last. No reason at all for a nice jolly boy to have been so stuffy with mother. You don't know where he lives?"

Nancy did not. "Only it's very near Baxter's Reef—nearer than we are."

"Queer," mused Dick. "I haven't seen him since that night. He doesn't seem to go swimming or sailing with the crowd, and he never loafs around with the other fellows that belong on the Point. I've asked lots of 'em if they know him. Nobody has as much as set eyes on any one of his description ——"

"Well, you'll have to look up the mysterious Green Knight," said mother cheerfully, grateful for the faint spark of interest that the subject had evoked from her moody daughter. "In the mean-

time, Dick, run along to your boat-races. As Nancy can't think of anybody she wants a visit from, why, we two will do our best to amuse each other."

"No indeed." Dick's air of responsibility was comical. "You're to have a nap and a walk every afternoon, madam. Doctor's orders and mine. I'm going out later, perhaps. These races don't amount to much."

"All the same," Nancy informed him rather crossly, "you're dying to be out watching them. You didn't half count your cribs, you were so busy looking out the window. So go along, and you too, mother. I shall take a nap." Nancy tossed two extra pillows on a chair, readjusted the one remaining, and summarily closed the argument by turning her face to the wall. She had not taken a daytime nap since her baby days, and hitherto, since her accident, she had irritably refused even to try that method of passing the time. She had no intention of trying now. As soon as Dick had gone and mother's door was safely closed, she would put back her extra pillows and read. The doctor had told her not to use her eyes very much, and she had already spent most of the morning over a book, to avoid playing parchesi, a game which she particularly disliked, with Josephine, who adored it. But who cared for that?

Nancy Lee certainly had no idea of bothering about an incapable doctor's silly notions.

However, before she could safely begin to read, she had to wait while Dick and mother held a whispered conference in the hall. Then mother tiptoed back to adjust the curtains, after which she annoyingly delayed settling down for her own nap. Nancy listened to her stealthy movements in the next room, wondered if she dared stop playing 'possum before mother had lain down, and decided against it, since the one thing she most wanted was, not a chance to finish a rather stupid story, but just to be let alone.

Nancy did sincerely regret giving her tired mother so much extra trouble. She honestly wanted to cause her as little anxiety as possible. Every morning, when she woke up, she resolved to try to be cheerful; but the sight of mother's pitying face, Dick's unwonted consideration for her, the children's clumsy efforts to amuse,—instead of comforting her, only made her more miserable. She pitied herself, with mother; realized, with Dick, all the jolly times she was missing; irritably decided that it was only fair for the children to do everything they could for her. So the very things that should have made her cheerful and considerate filled her contrary little soul with misery, and before she knew it cross words and

black looks had torn her good resolutions to tatters again.

But now, left to herself, with nobody to listen to her grumblings or pet her if she cried, Nancy felt neither like crying nor grumbling. Her eyes shut lest mother should reappear without warning, she speculated quite happily about the queer Green Knight, reviewed her talk with brown-eyed Hope Haskins, and wondered when she should see either of her new friends again. If only Hope could come to see her, Nancy thought, they could find plenty to talk about; but Hope couldn't come of course; she was too busy.

"Maybe she might be able to get off some day when it rains," Nancy decided finally. "On rainy days nobody would go to 'The Sign of the Dolphin' for tea, so the woman there wouldn't need her, and Hope wouldn't care about going to the rocks. I'd like to show her my tree and my view. I wonder if she has a nice room at the Inn. I suppose waitresses generally have to take——"

Drowsy from having read all the morning and from the midday heat, worn out with all her worries and tears and rebellions, Nancy snuggled down on her pillows and her thoughts trailed wearily off into a happy little dream.

Presently mother, who couldn't sleep at all

with her unhappy daughter on her mind, crept to the door, and smiled delightedly at what she saw.

Now she would go for her walk; she must keep herself as fresh as possible for Nancy. So, instructing Rosa to answer the invalid's bell, but on no account to disturb her unless she rang, Mrs. Lee went happily off. The afternoon breeze sprang up from the sea to cool the sleeper's hot cheeks and make her nap more refreshing. In the quiet house, empty save for soft-footed, listening Rosa, Nancy slept on and on. It was late afternoon when she woke up, stretched deliciously, blinking in the strong light, and suddenly gave vent to a startled "Oh!" at sight of a perfectly strange lady standing at the foot of her bed.

"Well, I *am* relieved," said the visitor, smiling sociably and flitting round to the side of the bed. "I just couldn't make up my mind to wake you up, and I've got another patient way the other side of the Point at five-thirty."

"But I don't understand ——" began Nancy in bewilderment.

"Why, I'm Mrs. Miggs," explained her caller eagerly. "The doctor told you about me, of course. Your hired girl said that, as long as you were expecting me, I might as well come right up. I think," added Mrs. Miggs, with the air of impart-

ing an interesting confidence, "that her dinner was jest where she couldn't very well leave it."

"But the doctor didn't tell me about you, Mrs. Miggs."

Nancy wasn't in the least frightened or annoyed by Mrs. Miggs's intrusion. You couldn't be afraid of such a tiny creature. She was the smallest, thinnest little body imaginable. As she talked to Nancy, she peered at her and at the room with bright, bird-like glances, from under her small black bonnet; and her motions, as she flitted about the bed, were quick and darting, so that her whole appearance reminded Nancy of a lively sparrow; only her plumage was all somber, rather rusty black, instead of sparrow-like brown.

Nancy's remark about the doctor threw Mrs. Miggs into a paroxysm of twittering indignation. "He didn't? You really mean he didn't say a word about me? Well, I *never!* That young sprig! I must say I am surprised!" And she fixed Nancy with a particularly piercing stare of astonishment. "Well, I ain't clearing matters up much, am I?" she continued, after a minute. "I'll tell Sammy what I think of him when we next meet, and I'll tell you now that Miss Marston couldn't come to-day. He said she had a headache, but I'm inclined to think she wanted to go sailing with one of her many admirers." Mrs. Miggs

paused to reflect. "Well, you can't be young and beautiful but once—and sometimes not that, as in my case for instance. So we won't blame her,—not till we know the facts, anyways. And so Doctor Sam Jennings asked me to come in her place, but he promised to 'phone your mother and let me know if it was perfectly agreeable. Now the point is, am I wanted?"

Nancy laughed. The sulkiest, most depressed cripple could not have resisted the infectious cheerfulness of the sparrow-like little masseuse. "Why, yes," she said, "I'm sure you'll give my ankle a splendid treatment, Mrs. Miggs."

"I'll do my level best," returned Mrs. Miggs brightly. "Nobody can do more—leastways I can't. Now you tell me where to find water and towels, and I'll point right for 'em. I hate to call that girl, she seemed so tied up with her dinner."

So Nancy explained locations, and Mrs. Miggs hopped busily back and forth, chattering all the time.

"This is a lovely spot," she said, having finally seated herself by the bed, with Nancy's swollen foot resting on a snowy white apron that she had produced, as if by magic, along with an incredible number of other conveniences, from an infinitesimal black silk bag. "I always hoped that Miss Willis would want me, she being famous, and the

house the kind that excited my cur'osity and all. But she never did. I do hope I'm not intruding to-day. Several of the patients decided to omit treatments until Miss Marston got well."

Nancy reassured her, making an effort to be cordial that would have astonished the absent Miss Marston and her own family as well.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," Mrs. Miggs told her. "Of course under the circumstances I naturally feel nervous. How long since you sprained your foot?"

Nancy told her, and inquired how long, in Mrs. Miggs's opinion, it would stay sprained.

"Oh, I can't tell anything about that," chirped Mrs. Miggs, "leastways not to-day. And what's more," she grew confidential, "Sammy Jennings can't either. Some sprains go slow an' some fast. There ain't no tellin'."

"You've lived here a long time, haven't you?" said Nancy. "Dr. Jennings isn't so particularly young now, so I suppose you knew him when he was."

"Land, yes! I was with Mis' Jennings when he was born. His father'll always be *the* doctor to me, an' Sammy'll be the young doctor, till his hair's white—that is, if I last to see it so. I was brung up here. I s'pose you know Captain Baker?"

"Of course," Nancy assured her eagerly.

"Well, I'm his sister. Gen'rally summers I go up to Kittaning Corners, where my sister keeps a boarding-house. There ain't no frilly young nurses up there, an' the doctor is mighty glad to see me. But this year I couldn't very well leave to go."

"Well, it's lovely here," suggested Nancy consolingly. "Your brother is teaching my brother to sail. Father is willing that Dick should go out alone in our boat as soon as Captain Baker says he knows enough to. Dick's out with him now."

"He *is?*" Little Mrs. Miggs reveled in the coincidence. "Brother's awful busy these days. He says he never seen Halcyon so full o' jolly young folks. He's had parties out most every night this week—moonlight, you know."

Nancy said nothing. So that was why Dick had disappeared every evening after dinner, and mother never seemed to know where he had gone. They were trying to hide all the good times from her, because she couldn't join in them. A sudden flood of tears welled up into Nancy's gray eyes.

Mrs. Miggs darted an unsuspecting glance at her. "Oh, do I hurt you, my dear?" she demanded anxiously, observing the tears. "You'd ort to tell me if I do."

"You don't hurt," disclaimed Nancy hastily.

"That is—only a little. I don't mind being hurt." It was no use! Her handkerchief was back under all the pillows. Nancy clawed for it frantically, fighting vainly against the rising tide of her misery.

"Here!" Mrs. Miggs shook out a snowy handkerchief, drawn from the inexhaustible black bag. "Now have your cry out on it. It is hard to be missin' all the frolics, an' it was too bad I didn't think in time to steer our conversation some other way. Steerin' conversations is about the most important part of nursin' and I don't gen'rally let 'em get away from me."

"Oh, it d-d-oesn't m-matter," sobbed Nancy. "I just hate staying here! It will be for six weeks, probably, the doctor says, and I—o-o-h-h dear!"

"That's right," advised Mrs. Miggs sociably. "Have your cry right out! But next time you feel one comin' on, you jest think how many folks are worse off than you. That's the best cure for tears that I know of."

"Maybe it is," snapped Nancy crossly, "but I don't know anybody that's worse off. Being stuck in the house—or on the piazza—for all summer ——"

"Yes, it's bad, I'll admit," agreed Mrs. Miggs. "Some girls wouldn't mind much—the mooney, good-for-nothin' kind that like to jest set an'

dream, and let other folks work. But you're active. You like to flax 'round. Jest the samey, you try my rule, an' you'll cheer up something lovely."

Nancy shrugged disdainfully. "What have those other people to do with me—poor people in cities and sick people in hospitals, I suppose you mean. I'm not sick. I'm here to have a good time during my summer vacation. And now everything's spoiled."

Mrs. Miggs peered at her interestedly. "So you think you're the only person whose vacation is spiled, do you? You think you're the only unhappy person in Halcyon, do you? You jest watch! You jest be on the lookout!"

Nancy sniffed. "How can I, when I'm stuck in here?"

Mrs. Miggs posed her small head on one side quizzically. "S'pose I told you that I seen the express turnin' down here as I got out of the trolley-car. S'pose I told you how he offered me a lift, an' how we laughed when we seen that we was coming to the very same house. Want to know what he brung?" Without waiting for an answer, Mrs. Miggs darted out the door and fluttered down-stairs, returning in a moment with a bundle that was unmistakably crutches.

"Now you won't be so confined," said Mrs.

Miggs, with the proud air of offering Nancy an airship or a magic carpet at the very least. "Why, as soon as you git a little handy with these, you can make wonderful progress. What do you say to preparing a little surprise right now for your folks?"

Deftly Mrs. Miggs helped Nancy to dress, and then escorted her down the hall and through Mrs. Lee's room, establishing her in an armchair on the little up-stairs piazza.

"You'll come again?" said Nancy as Mrs. Miggs, having arranged everything in the most comfortable fashion, prepared to depart.

Mrs. Miggs, poised airily in the door, darted back to readjust Nancy's rug. "That's as heaven and Miss Marston decrees."

"But I want *you!*" said Nancy. "I'd rather have you than Miss Marston."

Mrs. Miggs chuckled. "I'd like to hear you say that to the young doctor. We two can't settle anything without speakin' to him and to your mother. But whether I come again or whether I don't, you remember my rule. You hunt for the other unfortunates. You be on the lookout! And don't you hunt too far from home, neither. Good-bye!"

Nancy laughed heartily over mother's distracted hunt through the next room for a missing daugh-

ter. She was enthusiastic about her outdoor chamber. "Though I shan't snatch away your private piazza for long, mother," she declared. "To-morrow I'm going down-stairs." She insisted upon hearing all about the yacht races, and she made a comical story for the family out of her visit from Mrs. Miggs. Dick and his mother exchanged amazed glances, and Josephine inquired pointedly if Nancy "felt better."

"I'm ashamed to say that I do," laughed Nancy, looking straight at mother.

That evening, for the first time since the night of her accident, Nancy had something to say to the Red Journal.

"I wonder what she meant about hunting near home," Nancy concluded her account of Mrs. Miggs's visit. "I wonder if she meant mother. Is it worse for her to have me laid up than for me to be laid up? Could 'Doctor Sammy' have told Mrs. Miggs so? Poor mother! I *will not be cross* any more! Forgetting to be pleasant is as bad as forgetting to pick things up. A cross person is worse than a disorderly room. I *will be* pleasant.

"Maybe I can help in other ways too. It doesn't seem very likely, but I mustn't forget that I'm a Wonder-Worker. It's lucky we changed the name of our society from Woodland Wanderers, which I couldn't possibly be now, to something

that I can try to be. Trying doesn't always work wonders. Sometimes they just happen—like settling the Timmy Auction by having the Princess marry the Ogre. But if trying doesn't always help, I guess it seldom hinders. I'm going to try.

"To-morrow I shall put on my Wonder-Worker jumper and sit on the piazza and think hard about how I can be helpful. But I'm going to be pleasant whatever happens. N. LEE."

CHAPTER IV

NANCY'S LOOKOUT

It was amazing, next morning on the piazza, how Nancy's thoughts flew to happy conclusions.

"Maybe everything is not spoiled," she wrote in the Red Journal, which she had asked Josephine to bring down for her. She had had hard work persuading her conscientious little sister that she really preferred to be alone this morning, and that there was therefore no reason why Josephine should not join her beloved brother on the bathing-beach.

"I promised father to take turns, and to give up things," asserted Josephine. "I mustn't forget to do it."

"Some other time when I want you more will please father just as much," explained Nancy. "I'm busy making plans now, dearie. When I've planned, I'll tell you all about it, and you'll probably have to help me a lot, but this morning I'd really rather you would go off with Billy."

"Honest 'n' true?" inquired Josephine, and lost no time in going.

"Even if my summer is spoiled," Nancy wrote on in the Red Journal, "mother's mustn't be, nor Dick's nor the children's. That would be too silly for anything—to let one little sprained ankle spoil five lovely summers.

"Things I can do to help, even if I am lame:

I. Mend stockings. (I hate it, but probably so does mother.)

II. Plan menus for mother. I've heard her say it's the most trying part of housekeeping for her, but I think it will be just fun—looking through cook-books to find good things for us to eat.

III. Amuse Bill and Joe on rainy days. Generally they hang around mother, asking, 'What can we do?' till everybody is sick of the sight of them.

IV. If Dick wants to know the boy and girls next door, and hoped that I would manage it for him, I suppose I might be decent enough to let mother ask them over—especially as they're new here. You wouldn't dream, to see him around, that Dick is shy, but he is. Perhaps the girls next door are shy too, and not snippy and distant, as Charlotte Carter thought.

"I can't think of any more things yet, but I'll

leave a space for others, and these four will do to begin on. I do certainly wonder if Mrs. Miggs meant mother, when she told me to hunt near home for unhappy people. Whether she did or not, I'm afraid mother did mind about me dreadfully ; she looks so relieved and happy now that I've stopped growling for a while. But how I can be on the lookout for any more unhappy people passes me, as Jane Learned is forever saying, while I have to stick on this woodsy piazza, all shut in from the road. When Mrs. Miggs comes again day after to-morrow, I'll make her tell me about some others, just to prove that she knows some. I think it was mean of 'Doctor Sammy' to say that I didn't need another rub till day after to-morrow."

Mrs. Lee could hardly believe her ears when Nancy, actually smiling about it, insisted that she be allowed to help with the mending and the menus, and then asked her mother to call on the family next door and invite the two girls to come over. Dick was equally astonished when his sister demanded details of all the sailing-parties, past and to come.

"The most entertaining thing you can do, Dick," she insisted gaily, "is to buzz around in Halcyon society as hard as you can, and tell me all the gists. You're a very poor cribbage player, especially when you're thinking of other things.

So run along and enjoy yourself, and bring home all the news."

Boylike, Dick said nothing, but he privately decided that "Nance was a brick." Determined to have an exceptionally entertaining report to deliver to her at lunch-time, he resolved to devote his morning to the quest for the Green Knight. So he tramped over to Surf Road and sauntered down one winding crossroad after another, past all the houses reasonably near to the big Reef. Finally, eliminating those whose occupants he was sure did not include the object of his search, he narrowed the possibilities down to three. Dick was a persistent youth. He waited in a mosquito-haunted ambush for half an hour in front of one house, only to discover that it was vacant and the signs of life about the place were caused by the visit of an agent and a prospective tenant. At the next house there was no suitable ambush, so Dick boldly walked to the door and demanded John Andrews. Now John Andrews was Dick's chum. The Andrews cottage was a quarter of a mile away, and, as Dick knew to his sorrow, it was still unoccupied. So he felt quite safe in inquiring for John, and he elicited from a neat parlor-maid the information that she had never heard of such a person and that her master's name was Parke. Dick knew the Parkes; there was

no mysterious Green Knight in that staid household.

His plan of ringing door-bells had worked so well once that Dick decided to try it again at the third house, a small white one, hidden behind a tall clipped hedge. It was a little place, but so spick-and-span and dainty, with its hedge and green lawns and gay flower borders, that Nancy had once named it "The Gem." Dick knew the people who owned the place, but this summer they were in Europe; and possibly the Green Knight's family had rented it.

"The Gem" had a tiny front porch, with box-trees at each end of the steps, and green settles for tired callers. Dick rang and waited. No response.

"Are they all out, or do they think I'm an agent?" wondered Dick, ringing again, this time long and loud.

As he stepped back from the bell, his eye was caught by a small moving object on a side porch of the house. The porch was a big square one, shaded by green wicker curtains. One of these was only half drawn down, and just below it Dick could see a white object moving rapidly to and fro.

His observations were interrupted when the door was flung open by the oddest little figure imaginable. Dick stared in amazement at her starched white cap with its wide revers, framing a

wistful, wrinkled old face, at her quaint folded kerchief, and her full black skirt that stood out balloon-like around her slim, bent figure. And the old servant, if such she was, stared back at him in mute, half-frightened disapproval.

In a moment Dick found voice to inquire for Johnny. The old woman shook her capped head slowly, with an air of bewildered wonderment.

Dick tried again. "I want Mr. John Andrews. Does he live here?"

Again she shook her head. "Not at home," she pattered, in a high, toneless voice.

"But does he live here?" persisted Dick, sure that the old woman understood nothing, and hoping that she would call somebody to her aid.

She apparently had no such intention. "Not at home, nobody at home, you please to go away," she expanded her set speech this time; and Dick decided to adopt her suggestion before she shut the door in his face.

It was queer, he thought, that at such a perfectly appointed house, with its neat striped awnings, its window-boxes of pink geraniums, its velvety lawns, its garden-beds rioting with blossoms,—it was queer that the people who lived at "The Gem" should put up with so strange a parlor-maid. Either she was deaf or she knew no English—the foreign costume suggested the latter.

They must be queer people. Well, wasn't the Green Knight queer? Besides, there was no other house for him to live in, unless he was merely visiting at Halcyon, in which case he might be stopping almost anywhere. But he had spoken to Nancy of "our house." Perhaps that was he now, moving something out on the screened porch. Finding a peep-hole in the tall hedge, Dick cautiously reconnoitered. He could see the half-drawn curtain, the sunlit space below it, the fluttering white object. Ah, it was a hand, and it was writing; the glittering thing that caught the sunlight was a silver penholder. But it wasn't even a boy's hand; it was too small and too white. Besides, there was also visible a bare white arm—a lady's arm. She must have a lot to say, Dick thought, tramping glumly back to "The Crags," to be writing so fast and so steadily. A whole morning gone, and nothing to show for it!

Nancy greeted him joyously. "Who do you think has been here? Yes, somebody you know and like. Somebody you didn't expect. Johnny Andrews!"

Dick whistled. "But their house is still closed. I noticed this morning."

"Notice again this afternoon. Mrs. Andrews and Johnny are at the Inn—came last night.

John had such a funny time going to our old house and being 'bowled over,' as he said, to find strangers there. This afternoon they're going to take two cleaning-women out to their house, and to-morrow the rest of the family are coming."

"Gee!" Dick was clearly annoyed. "Then he'll be busy all this afternoon. Just my luck to have been prowling around hunting that queer boy, and missed Johnny."

"Was that where you were?" laughed Nancy. "Then I'm afraid you did waste your time, because —— What did you find out?"

"Nothing," admitted Dick gloomily. "Unless you count that perhaps I spotted the house where he lives. If so, there's a lady in the family that was writing letters like mad this morning, and the maid that answers the bell is either deaf or a foreigner. At least she's a foreigner for sure, and maybe deaf into the bargain, and she's not a bit interested in stray callers. She told me 'please to go away.'"

Nancy laughed delightedly. "Oh, Dick, you did find the right house then—the lovely one that I call 'The Gem'! Johnny says the right name of it is 'Fair Acre.' But how did you happen to ring their bell? Do you know the boy's name?"

"No, I don't know anything about him, except

what you told me." Dick explained his bell-ringing scheme. "I suppose Johnny told you whatever new you know. Let's have it."

"It's not much," admitted Nancy. "Last night Mrs. Andrews telephoned the Parkes, who have her keys, and the Parkes came to the Inn to see her. They told her about a queer family near them—a boy and his mother and a deaf French maid who works all day and never goes out, and an old gardener who sings queer foreign chants at his work and never goes out either. And when the lady goes out she wears a veil—a green veil, Johnny thought they said—drawn tight over her face. Sometimes she even wears it in the garden. And the boy runs if he's spoken to."

"Nice neighbors!" sniffed Dick.

"They'd suit me beautifully," laughed Nancy. "I wish they lived near us. I could have splendid times watching them and trying to puzzle them out. Mrs. Parke thinks the woman is crazy, and the boy keeps out of the way so he won't have to answer questions about her. Mr. Parke thinks she's been disfigured in some dreadful accident. But as I told Johnny, that boy I met didn't act as if his mother was insane or terribly hurt, and he wanted to hide it. He seemed too gay and jolly. So Johnny said that perhaps she was a beautiful young widow hiding from an

insistent lover, and she's given the crusty maid orders not to let any one in."

"That's your idea, not Johnny's," sniffed Dick, not yet reconciled to his wasted morning. "Johnny would think up something with blood-and-thunder in it, instead of love."

"Perhaps we thought it up together," Nancy admitted amiably. "And Johnny's coming back to have lunch with you, so cheer up."

Nancy chuckled to herself at the idea of the tearful young lady of yesterday having arrived at the point of urging others to cheer up. But strange as it might seem, to-day she really had cheerfulness to spare.

"Maybe even my summer won't be spoiled," she wrote in the Red Journal after luncheon, when she was alone on the piazza again. Then she added a fifth item to her list of helpful activities:

"See to it that Bill and Joe go off somewhere right straight after lunch. The contrary creatures stick around and shout, when mother ought to be having her nap."

It was still mid-afternoon, but time was beginning to hang heavy, and the ankle to throb and prickle as it always did when Nancy had nothing to divert her mind from it. Her book was upstairs, the stockings all mended, and she couldn't

remember just how to go on with the crocheting that mother had started for her.

"Oh, de ——" began Nancy, but stopped to wonder about a low, persistent "Whu-whu!" that had sounded once or twice around the end of the piazza.

"Whu-whu-whu-whu!" Where had she heard that owlish hoot before?

"Whu-whu-whu-whu!"

Hope Haskins, of course, calling from the top of Baxter's Reef. "Whu-whu —— Here I am!" called back Nancy. Mother had gone for her walk now, so quiet was no longer necessary. "Come right around the house. I'm on the piazza at the back. I can't come to meet you, or get up, or anything," she added as the little brown-clad figure came nearer.

"I know!" Hope called back. "That's the particular reason why I came. But I can't see why, if your house has a pretty name like 'The Crags,' you don't stick it up somewhere. I wasn't a bit sure that I'd come to the right place."

"Well, you have," Nancy assured her, "and at the right time too, because I'm longing for company. I was going to write and ask you if you couldn't come to see me some day when it rained."

"When it rained?" Hope's brown eyes were vague with wonderment.

"Because then, if you had time for any extras, you wouldn't want to be out on the rocks," explained Nancy. "How did you get away from 'The Sign of the Dolphin'? And how did you know about my ankle?"

"One question at a time, please," laughed Hope, sitting down in one of the wicker chairs, after she had laid a big bundle she carried carefully on a table. "I heard about your ankle in a funny way. Miss Willis had a bad headache yesterday. She called the doctor and the doctor sent a nurse to massage her head, and the nurse told her about a girl at 'The Crags' who'd sprained her ankle five days ago. That was our day, you see, and you'd told me where you lived, and I'd told Miss Willis about you and how you said you'd come to the shop. So she naturally told me why you couldn't come at present. That's how I knew. And I got here to-day because Miss Willis sent me to a house called 'Gray Gables' with that big bundle, and she said I might stop to inquire for you, and then you, or somebody else here, would tell me how to get to 'Gray Gables.' So that's how I got here and, as usual, I can't stay but a minute."

"Then there's something I want to ask you," Nancy told her earnestly. "You remember what you said the other day about enjoying glimpses of rocks and pools more than you would if you had

all day to wander around and look at them. Do you really think that's so?"

"Oh, I know it!" cried Hope eagerly, her big eyes blazing. "Why, this very minute I'm enjoying you and this lovely piazza and these pretty chairs and the flower-beds and the paths that wander off to lovely places where I've never been —I'm enjoying it to make up for ironing napkins in a stifling hot laundry all this morning, when it wasn't my turn to iron, and for dropping a tray of dishes yesterday and being scolded and made to pay for what was broken, and for all the other horrid things that have happened lately, and that are probably going to happen soon. I'm having a perfectly blissful time! I'm storing up things to think over and things to wonder about. But you —you sit here every day, and you don't have to drink the loveliness down in big gulps and then run." Hope sighed happily. "If I didn't have to take my joys in gulps, I'm sure I should miss lots of them."

"I—think—I see," said Nancy slowly. "Now if I were like you, I could make the lovely walk I had the day I met you last over these days when I can't walk at all, and then I shouldn't feel so unhappy about my accident."

"Yes," nodded Hope. "That's it. And being here on this lovely, shady piazza would make up

to you for the days when you had to stay up-stairs, and your having a pretty room—I know you have one—would make up ——"

"Go up and see it, if you want to," suggested Nancy. "It's the door at the left of the stairs. Be sure to notice my tree and my view and my wall-paper."

In a moment Hope came running back, so radiant that Nancy made another suggestion. "I want you to see my Birdcage too. Only I can't bear not to show it to you myself. Would you have time to help me out there? We should have to go slowly, but it's only a few steps."

Hope's eyes danced. "Oh, yes, I can do that, because I'll hurry all the way to 'Gray Gables' and back, to make up for lost time. You are splendid to me, Nancy Lee. Everybody is—almost—taking a lot of trouble to show me things that they think I shall love. I'm guessing hard this minute about what wonderful kind of birdcage you can have hung up out there in the woods."

"I don't think it was very splendid of whoever made you pay for those broken dishes," said Nancy, as they started for the Birdcage. "I think it's downright mean to make a person pay for an accident."

"Oh, not mean, exactly," qualified Hope. "You see I knew about the breakage fines, and I ought

to have been more careful. Of course another girl shoved me—but I ought to have looked out for that. Losing the forty cents will make me most dreadfully careful for all summer, and by that time perhaps I shall have got the habit of carefulness, which would be cheap at forty cents," ended Hope quaintly.

"I guess it would!" sighed Nancy. "I'm dreadfully careless myself. I suppose I was being careless when I got this sprain. And I'm always dropping things and losing them and forgetting. One of the Fair Oaks girls—that's the name of my school—nicknamed me Miss I-Forgot. But just at present I'm more interested in being cheerful than careful. Whether you're used to it or not, you have to be pretty careful on crutches."

Hope nodded. "And—oh, surely you can't be very cheerless, with this to come out to!" she cried, catching sight of the little summer-house. "What a darling place! And you say it's your own little house? I think it belongs partly to the fairies, Nancy Lee."

After a few blissful minutes spent in inspecting the arrangements of the Birdcage, trying the perches, as Hope insisted upon calling the chairs and seat, and hearing about Nancy's projected improvements, Hope declared that she must go. It wouldn't be fair to Miss Willis to stay any longer.

"Not that she specially needs me back in a hurry," said Hope, "because so few people come to the shop yet. But she pays me, so the afternoon belongs to her. You're sure you're all right here, Nancy Lee? I'd better tell some one at the house where you've disappeared to."

Having gone a little way down the path, Hope ran back again with a parting suggestion. "Mermaids help me a lot these days," she announced cryptically. "I mean, to think about, when I can't be doing the things I want to. It really seems as if I could imagine mermaids better when I can't get out to see their haunts. So now that you can't climb out on our big rock, you try imagining mermaids there. It helps a lot."

"Thank you—but I'd rather have you out on Baxter's with me than any silly mermaid," retorted Nancy laughingly.

"Oh, really? Thank you for that!" cried Hope, darting down the path and out of sight, this time for good.

Lying back in her rustic chair, Nancy smiled happily to herself over the notion of a matter-of-fact person like Nancy Lee spending her thoughts on mermaids. As she had told Hope, she preferred to think about real people. She wished somebody else would come to see her. Mother had promised to call next door; just possibly she might bring back the

girls with her. That would be pleasant, only if, upon further acquaintance, she decided that she didn't like them, Nancy hated to have them find her in the Birdcage. She meant to keep that for choice spirits like Hope.

"I'm tired, I tell you! I'm tired!" sang a shrill little voice almost in Nancy's ear. Somebody was down on the rocks—the public rocks outside the fence. Not mermaids, but real persons. Nancy twisted herself round in her chair and looked down, just as another explosive announcement floated up to her.

"No, I don't wanter play in the sand," shrilled the same cross little voice. "I won't! I won't! I wanter see my father. I hate this place. I *shall* cry if I wanter! Stop scratching me, you kitten!"

Down below the Birdcage stood a child—the palest, thinnest, sickliest little girl Nancy had ever seen. Her white face was shaded by a flopping white muslin hat. Her dress was white, and her shoes and stockings. Under her arm she carried a fluffy white ball of fur that Nancy thought was a toy kitten, until, at an impatient twitch from its little mistress, it mewed piteously.

Beside the cross child stood a stiffly starched, unhappy-looking nurse-maid, holding on a leash a beautiful white wolfhound, who, tugging hard at his leash, looked rather unhappy too.

"Give me the kitten, and you take your pail and spade and go and play in the sand," suggested the nurse once more.

"I won't! I won't!" shrieked the little white girl. "I want my kitten an' my father. You go 'way! I don't want you!"

"I'll make you a sand-castle," suggested the poor nurse desperately. "A lovely castle in ——"

"You won't!" shrieked the child. "I wanter go home, I do. I'm tired."

"But your grandpapa said ——" began the poor nurse.

"That old thing!" shrieked the naughty child. "I won't mind him! I'll mind my father. My father lets me do all the nice things I wanter. He ——"

Nancy had listened, fascinated by the noisy fury of the tiny, white-faced virago. Now she leaned forward and gave Hope's owl-hoot. "Whu-whu —— Who are you?" she called. "I'm a little bird, and this is my cage. Who are you, down there? A little chattering squirrel, I think, or a clam come out of his hole in the sand to look around."

At the sound of Nancy's voice, the child jumped back, startled, and dropped the fluffy kitten, which gave a frightened "miaow" as it fell, and then squatted down contentedly on the warm

sand. In a minute the child saw Nancy's yellow head peering out from the greenery above her.

"Um! You're a big story-teller," she cried. "You're a girl, not a bird, and I'm a little girl. You stop talking to me!"

"Oh, but I am truly and honestly in a Bird-cage," persisted Nancy smilingly. "You just come up and see if I'm not—if your nurse is willing. The name of it is all printed on my little cage. And I'm a caged bird, too. My wing is broken, so I can't hop down to you. I have to stay right here in my—on my perch."

"Um! You big story-teller!" mocked the little white girl. "I don't wanter come up 'n' see. I won't come up! I want my father. I hate this old place."

"Hush, dearie," the shocked nurse besought her small charge. "You mustn't be rude to the nice lady. She's telling you a pretty story, and inviting you up to see her. Oh"—in a shriller key of dismay—"you naughty, naughty girl!"

For, without waiting for any more talk about it, the little white girl had made a dive after the fluffy kitten and now, hardly touching the rocks as she went, she was running away as fast as her pipe-stem legs could carry her.

"Oh, my! She's not let to run!" cried the white-capped nurse dismally, and was off in pant-

ing pursuit, with the great white hound, contrary as his little mistress, now pulling obstinately back on his leash.

"Well, of all awful children!" Nancy leaned back in her rustic chair. "Poor little thing! She must have been dreadfully ill, to be so pale and thin. Her face is like a little old woman's. I pity that nurse." Suddenly Nancy gave a glad little cry. "Why, I've found them—two more unfortunates. And I wasn't even on the lookout,—unless you call it being on the lookout to be sitting up in this Birdcage. It's the best lookout I've got, anyway; but of course it's only by accident that I discovered those two. I should never see any more from here, probably. I wonder if Mrs. Miggs knows that dreadful child. And I wonder if the child has any real things to be unhappy about, or whether she's just cross as—I—was," admitted honest Nancy. "Under the circumstances, I guess I'd better be feeling sorry for her instead of calling her a dreadful child, poor little mite!"

CHAPTER V

MORE NEW FRIENDS

THE two girls who lived next door were not sisters; they were cousins. Alexandra was Alexandra Little, sister of the tall boy who could do the wonderful diving. Cecilia was Cecilia Green, who lived in Ohio but spent most of her summers with her Eastern cousins. The Little boy's name was Peter, and because he was so very tall he was naturally nicknamed Little Peter. But this fact did not come out till after the ice had been broken, and Cecilia's and Alexandra's formal call of neighborly condolence had been turned into a very merry visit that lasted most of the afternoon, included Dick and Peter and Johnny Andrews, and ended on the tennis-court,—tennis-courts being, as is well known, excellent places for breaking social ice.

Alexandra was tall and fair and very quiet. Cecilia was little and dark and did the talking for both.

"We felt so sorry when we heard of your accident," said Alexandra in her sweet, low voice.

"Aunt May tried to have us come right over

and see you," added Cecilia, "but Alexandra wouldn't."

"Oh, C.!" remonstrated her cousin. "It was only because I thought she might not feel like having us."

"It's fun here at Halcyon, isn't it?" Cecilia changed the subject swiftly. "We don't know many people yet, but we've been asked to go sailing to-morrow with a party from the Inn. You know Alexandra's brother Peter stayed there for a while last summer. And everybody talks to you when you're in the water. We go in every day."

Alexandra tried to catch her voluble cousin's eye. "There's no prettier place around here than this piazza, I think," she said, frowning hard at Cecilia.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" Cecilia saw the meaning of Alexandra's signals. "And it's splendid to have time to read and sew, and to be waited on, isn't it? Can you have all the good things you want to eat?"

"I'll bring you over some of our books, if you like," suggested Alexandra presently. "We brought a good many with us, but no one seems to care much for them."

"We can bring our sewing over sometimes too," put in Cecilia. "We brought piles of fancy work to do, and we haven't touched it."

"Oh, yes," chimed in Alexandra, looking pityingly at Nancy. "We shall be glad to come and sew with you."

Nancy had stood their pitying glances and tactful sympathy just as long as she could. "Oh, please stop bothering about me and planning to do things for me, and let's talk about something real!" she exploded suddenly. "I don't want to be pitied! I'm not forlorn! I hate to sit around all summer and read or sew, just as much as you two would, but I can stand it, I guess, if I have to. Only, since we all three know what a perfect nuisance a sprained ankle is, I'd rather talk about something else—something pleasanter."

Alexandra stared affrightedly at her hot-headed young hostess. Cecilia giggled. "What do you want to talk about?" she asked.

"Things we all like, such as tennis," returned Nancy promptly. "Have you a court? Then come and play on ours, and bring your brother."

"Oh, what larks!" cried eager Cecilia. "Where is your court? It's queer I never noticed it."

Nancy explained, and sent her two guests off to inspect the cleverly hidden tennis-ground.

"We should love to play here," Alexandra told her when they were back, "only won't it make you feel—you know," she ended, afraid to risk Nancy's displeasure by saying what she meant.

"No, it won't," declared Nancy stoutly. "I can sit on the green bench and watch, and keep score for you, maybe. My brother Dick will like to play with you. He's very fond of tennis."

"Goodie! Then we can get Peter and have mixed doubles!" cried Cecilia eagerly. "That's our favorite game. We'll certainly come soon." She hesitated. "Would to-morrow afternoon be too soon?"

"Cecilia!" remonstrated Alexandra.

"Well," explained Cecilia, "that court looks so tempting, and I thought it would be nice to settle something right now."

"Of course it would." Nancy, smiling a satisfied smile, took up Cecilia's proposal. She had been waiting for an excuse to call out her shy big brother, who had fled indoors at the approach of the two strange girls he so much wanted to know. Here was her opening. "I believe Dick is somewhere around here now," she said. "So you needn't wait even till to-morrow unless you want to. Oh, Dick!"

Dick lounged out, blushing furiously and acting as amazed as if he had not made Nancy solemnly promise to "get him into the game" the first chance she had. Why yes, he agreed rather hesitatingly, it wasn't a bad day for tennis. If

Peter Little couldn't be found to make a fourth for the match, he would stand the two girls.

But Peter was only too glad to come. He appeared after a few minutes with the girls, who had run home for shoes and racquets. Peter was noisy and jolly, more like Cecilia than Alexandra. He called his sister "Al" and his cousin "Miss C. Green" or just "Sea-Green."

"We only have her here because she's the right color," he explained facetiously.

He played a fair game, but not so well as Dick did; so that Dick, and Alexandra, who tried very hard but was, as her brother blandly explained, "an old duffer at sports," were very evenly matched against Peter and Cecilia, who, Nancy judged, played about as well as she did. In the middle of the afternoon Johnny Andrews appeared.

"Hello, Jonathan," said Nancy, making room for him on the green bench. "I'm not a bit surprised to see you. I thought I heard Dick telephoning you, when he went in to get the tennis net."

Johnny smiled. "S'pose he did telephone? He had to call off an engagement to go out in my new motor-boat, hadn't he? I'm naturally a meek little soul, but when I'm to be coldly turned down for a girl party I want to be notified in time to be

in on said party. That's perfectly fair, isn't it? Besides, I've got news for you."

"News for me?" Nancy wondered. "Oh, Johnny, is it about the Green Knight?"

Johnny nodded solemnly. "I've seen him. He was wearing his badge of office—green cap with feather aforesaid. He was walking. On two feet. Also whistling. I said 'Hello.' He did not run away from me."

"What a thrilling report!" laughed Nancy.

"Just the same," Johnny assured her, "he, and the party with the veil, and the gardener that makes the flowers grow in Dago and talks sign language with his fingers at that crazy looking cook,—they've got the neighborhood all fussed up."

The tennis set ended just then, and the players joined the spectators, the girls taking the bench and the boys the ground.

"Couldn't you go sailing if we helped you a lot about getting into the boat?" Johnny asked Nancy presently. "Because there's a perfectly good motor-launch tied up to your dock this minute, and plenty of time before dinner for us all here assembled to try her out."

Nancy shook her head. The steps down to the wharf were too steep for crutches, and the doctor had advised her not to try to get in and out of a

boat for a while. But she urged the rest to go, laughingly telling them that she had had enough company for one day. In this she was perfectly sincere; her ankle throbbed from having been kept so long in the normal position of well ankles; she longed to prop it up and stretch it out, with no regard for appearances. In the end she had her way. Dick and Johnny made a "lady's chair" and carried her gallantly back to the piazza, where the young people from next door said good-bye to her and thanked her for "a perfectly grand time."

"I'm glad you didn't want to be pitied," whispered Cecilia.

"So am I," chimed in Alexandra. "But for a minute when you objected to the topics of our conversation, you frightened me. I thought you meant that we had been—stupid."

It didn't take long for the throb in Nancy's ankle to subside, and then, after the gay time she had had earlier in the afternoon, the piazza seemed very dull and quiet.

"I'm getting lonely and cross," Nancy told herself. "I mustn't do that. I've had a gulp of fun, as Hope says, and it ought to last me for a while; but instead I want another right off now. I'll go to my lookout, and see how Mrs. Miggs's rule works."

So she hobbled out to the Birdcage and established herself in the biggest chair, overlooking the rocks and the water.

She had scarcely seated herself when a shrill little voice jeered up at her eagerly. "You are a story-teller, you are! You're not a bird. You don't stay in a cage. Your wing isn't broken—you haven't a wing. I saw you walk with two sticks under your arms. So now!" The little white girl jiggled on her pipe-stem legs, in defiant assertion of her thesis.

Nancy smiled cajolingly down at her small antagonist. "Don't you ever pretend?" she asked. "I think it's fun to pretend, and when I was smaller like you I used just to love it. Of course I'm a girl. I've hurt my ankle; that's why I walk on two sticks. But this truly is a Birdcage—you come and see if the name isn't fastened right up here on it—and I can't go far from the door of my cage, because walking on sticks is too hard work. So don't you think I might pretend I'm a bird?"

"You can pretend if you wanter," snapped the small drooping mouth. "I shan't. It's silly. I wanter go home. I came to see if you *were* a bird." She turned to the nurse, who stood beside her, eying her rude little charge with dull discouragement.

"Where's your kitten?" asked Nancy, determined to strike some spark of friendliness or interest from the strange, aloof child.

But the innocent question was like a red rag to a bull.

"Never you mind about that!" shrieked the child. "Never you mind!" She turned furiously on the nurse. "You old tattle-tale!" She stamped her little white-shod feet. "You old tattle-tale!"

Thus assailed, the drooping nurse was galvanized into sudden energy and a belated realization of her responsibilities. Slipping the dog's leash over her arm, she seized the child firmly by the shoulders.

"Clare," she ordered, "you are not to speak so to the lady, or to me. Tell her you are sorry."

"I'm not! I shan't!" cried the child.

"Then I shall have to tell your grandfather what a rude little girl you've been."

No answer.

"I'm going to tell the lady about your kitten." She looked up at Nancy. "It was taken away, ma'am, because she was saucy to her governess. She's not to have it back until she apologizes. And when I tell her grandfather about this, he'll take the dog away too, I fancy. Say you're sorry, Clare."

"I won't, I won't! I want my own kitten and my own dog. I want my own father! You old tattle-tale, you!"

"We'll go home this minute, Clare."

With a piercing shriek the child stiffened her small figure and refused to stir. Finally the outraged nurse stooped and picked her up and ran with her down the path. "I'll hold my breath if you don't let me down," shrieked the child, as the pair vanished, with the puzzled wolfhound complicating matters as usual by trying to lag behind.

"Poor little thing!" Nancy's gray eyes were full of tears. "I thought little children were always happy. Timmy was." She wished the twins and Margaret were there to adopt the little white girl as their prize Waif and Stray. Jeanne and little Sarah seemed creatures of joy compared to this miserable mite. If only Nancy could go down on the rocks with her, she felt sure she could make friends with the child.

She was still a very sober Nancy, when mother came with the key to the tea-chest—or the bird-seed box, as Hope had wanted it called.

"Will you ask me to tea, Nancy?" she demanded gaily. "I'm hungry as a bear after my walk."

Over the tea Nancy related her last experience with the strange child, the other having already

been retailed to the family. "I wonder if she can be a granddaughter of old Judge Smith's," said Mrs. Lee. "He's opened 'Gray Gables,' I see. I remember hearing that his youngest son had a little daughter whose mother died when she was born. The father is an artist and lives in some queer, far-away place—South America, perhaps."

"This little girl is always wailing for her father," Nancy remembered, "and she looks somehow different and foreign, so she's probably the 'Gray Gables' child. I wish I could think of something comical to make for her. Oh, I know! A peanut doll family! I do believe she'll like peanut dolls, and if she doesn't she's welcome to throw them down and stamp on them if she wants to, poor little, lonely thing."

Next day it rained. Nancy buttoned William and Josephine into their raincoats and sent them off to the Neck after peanuts and a spool of wire. While they were gone she interviewed Rosa, planned the day's meals, and mended a rip in Dick's bathing-suit. The children cleared a table for her on the piazza, found paste, string, ink, some bits of cloth, and sewing utensils, and then watched breathlessly while Nancy turned peanuts into dolls' bodies, arms, legs, and faces. By the time a "family" of six grotesque little wriggling dolls was finished, it had stopped raining, and

Josephine, who had been tremendously interested in Nancy's account of the strange child, volunteered to take the dolls up to "Gray Gables."

"But I'm not sure she lives there," objected Nancy. Then she laughed gleefully. "Yes, do take them, Joe. Her name is Clare. Don't leave them unless it's surely the right place. There!" When she was talking Nancy had printed on the peanut dolls' box: "Another little bird told me you lived here.—LADY BIRD-IN-A-CAGE."

In an incredibly short time, Josephine was back, a shocked expression on her small face.

"She lives there and she's an awfully rude little girl," announced Josephine primly. "She snatched at the box, and she never said 'thank you.' And when the lady that was with her reminded her to say it, she wouldn't. But an old man came—is he her father, Nancy?—and he thanked me and took me out to see the pony. She wouldn't come. Is it her pony, do you s'pose, Nancy? It looks so funny and little, all by itself in the big barn, because they have another place for all the automobiles. And the old man asked me to come again, after the pony's cart, which they've sent for, is here, and drive it around. But if I've got to play with that rude little girl I don't want to go. She's too little for me to play with, anyway."

"I'VE BEEN ON THE LOOKOUT"

"I've been on the lookout!" Nancy announced triumphantly to Mrs. Miggs when that lady appeared a little later in the day. "And I've found the unhappiest child in Halcyon."

"You don't say!" Mrs. Miggs's little black bonnet fluttered and her eyes snapped with interest, as Nancy told her about the little white girl. "The dretful child! I certainly pity those wimin that has the care of her. You put them on your list of unfortunates too, Miss Nancy. And jest to think of all she's got to make her happy, with that lovely big yard to play in and the old Judge turning things topsy-turvy to amuse her, so I've heard. I'll ask about the father and mother as I have chances to do so, and let you know."

Mrs. Miggs rubbed the ankle for a while in silence. "Unhappiness that ain't reasonable," she mused at last, "and unhappiness that can't be cured—they're both bad, but the last wrings your heart. My little lame grandchild—she must be just about the age of your sister—she lies in bed as cheerful and contented, thinkin' how she'll be walkin' again before long. But the chances is," Mrs. Miggs dropped her voice to the tone of a confidence,—"the chances is she'll lie there the rest of her life."

"Oh, what a pity!" Nancy's soft eyes sympathized eagerly with her new friend. "Things

like that make little troubles look like nothing, don't they? My little white girl is just a cry-baby, not a bit worth pitying, compared to yours."

"Don't you say that! Don't you be hard on her!" warned Mrs. Miggs zestfully. "My grandchild's got grit and good sperits, if her legs won't work right. And sometimes I think grit and good sperits is worth more than all the other things in this world put together."

"I couldn't be cheerful if I knew I should never walk again," sighed Nancy.

"She don't know it yit," explained Mrs. Miggs. "And she shan't neither, as long as there's any hope in her an' I'm 'round to chirk her up with a few more dretful fibs. But if she ever has to know the worst, she'll keep up. She's a wonder, that child is." Mrs. Miggs grew confidential again. "It's on her account I'm here with my daughter 'stead of up to Kittaning Corners as usual. She says nobody lifts her quite so easy as her granny."

"Would she like some peanut dolls, like the ones I made for my child?" demanded Nancy.

"She'd adore some," chirped Mrs. Miggs. "But my dear, what would set her up most would be to hear about this Birdcage of yours that you talk about. That story you made of it—that that other no-'count child laughed at—my lamb loves stories. If you'd jest explain it a little more—I ain't much

at these pertend games myself, but I enter in all I can, because it pleases her so."

"Why, it wasn't anything!" Nancy repeated her two conversations with the little white girl, and then sent Mrs. Miggs out to inspect the Birdcage, so that the little masseuse departed in a state of twittering delight,—"jest chock-full of interestin' news," as she herself described her condition.

CHAPTER VI

WAS HE THE BURGLAR?

"Of course you're all to go out in Johnny's boat! The fireworks will look a lot prettier from the water, and besides, you can run into the harbor past city park to see what the big crowds there are doing, and then past the Inn to see the dancing. I shall be perfectly happy here alone."

"Are you sure you won't be the least bit nervous?" Mrs. Lee asked her daughter anxiously. "Rosa will be out too, you know."

"Not a bit," persisted Nancy stoutly. "I'm never nervous."

"Then perhaps we will all go for a little while," decided Mrs. Lee. "I can't let the children go unless I'm with them, and having them on the boat is by far the easiest way of looking after them."

"Want to be escorted out to your private summer-house, Nancy?" asked Dick. "I say, it's a perfect shame you can't go to the Inn dance."

Nancy laughed at his earnestness. "Is Johnny Andrews trying to cut you out with Alexandra? I'm sorry I can't be on hand to divert his atten-

tion. No thank you, Dick. I think I'll keep to the piazza. I can see the bay almost as well from here, and it might be spooky down among the trees all by my lonesome."

"You'll have Regent to protect you," Dick reminded her, stooping to pat his collie. "He's too much underfoot in the boat."

So with her chair drawn up to the table-lamp, the Spoiled Kitten—very sleepy from frolicking with Josephine—in her lap, and the collie curled obediently at her feet, though he was fairly quivering with eagerness to be off after his master, Nancy prepared to enjoy her solitary Fourth of July evening as best she might. Secretly she was a little annoyed at the family for leaving her. She wasn't in the least frightened; fear of imaginary bogies never bothered Nancy Lee. But she had had a rather stupid day, for Fourth of July celebrations had displaced the regular tennis games, and everybody had been too busy to think much about Nancy, who was such a self-reliant, contented invalid nowadays that she received less consideration, perhaps, than she really needed.

"I do hate to be fussed over," she thought, "but all the same I'm awfully sick of sewing and reading and *sitting*. I believe I'd even enjoy parchesi. I wonder if Josephine would have stayed if I'd offered to play her beloved game."

The Spoiled Kitten awoke from its cat-nap, purring vociferously, and climbed up to lick Nancy's cheek affectionately. The collie yapped, as a particularly noisy motor went by on the road.

"Hush, Regent!" Nancy ordered, and was startled at the sound of her own voice breaking the perfect quiet of the evening.

A shower of many-colored sparks flamed out suddenly over the water. The fireworks had begun. Nancy looked at them, read, petted the kitten, called to Regent, who hated the detonations that accompanied the fireworks and prowled restlessly back and forth on the long piazza, getting lost in the darkness at either end. But always at the sound of Nancy's call he pattered back obediently, and curled up at her feet in response to her "Charge, Regent!"

Yawning, Nancy looked at her watch. Twenty-five minutes past eight; mother had meant to be back by half-past. But very likely Mrs. Andrews would persuade her to stay out longer. Rosa was almost always back before nine.

"And then," thought Nancy, "I shall go to bed. I don't care much for these fireworks. Perhaps they're having some wonderful low picture effects that I can't see, but the ones I can see are perfectly ordinary."

"Bow — wow — wow — wow —wow!" Regent

leaped up and bounded along the piazza, barking frantically.

He heard the family down at the dock, Nancy decided swiftly, annoyed at herself for having jumped and thereby frightened away the Spoiled Kitten, who hissed at her and the noisy Regent angrily from the piazza railing.

"Come here, Regent. Regent, come here!" called Nancy in her sternest tones. But Regent, bristling and growling out at the darkest end of the long piazza, paid not the slightest attention.

His actions puzzled and worried Nancy. He wasn't looking toward the water-path. He never growled unless some stranger appeared in his home domain, and not often then; he was a very friendly puppy.

Ah! It was Rosa of course,—Rosa and a beau, coming in at the little back gate. Regent had taken a curious aristocratic dislike to all men who came in at that little back gate—grocer's boys, milk and meat men, or Rosa's suitors. Dick suspected that the fish-man had started the feud with a surreptitious kick.

"Rosa! Rosa! Are you back?" called Nancy, above the dog's angry growls. "Speak to Regent, please, and he'll stop. Oh, be still, you naughty dog!"

But Regent would not be still. Instead, he

added an agitated running accompaniment to his growls; and each time that he neared Nancy's seat, he looked anxiously up in her face and gave vent to an agonized howl that said as plainly as words: "Here's trouble. Come and see to it, you lazy girl!"

"Oh, do stop, Regent!" cried Nancy desperately, after one such appeal. "There's nobody out there except Rosa, perhaps, and a friend of hers. People have a right to the road. They have a right to stand and talk out there. Well, if you just won't be quiet till I've been round the corner with you, I suppose I must go." Nancy picked up her crutches, turned on all the piazza lights, and followed Regent, who careered about joyously, and then, running ahead to the porch-corner, began once more that ominous angry growling. Bracing herself on one crutch, Nancy laid the other against the house and reaching down caught the noisy dog by the collar.

"Sh, Regent!" she ordered. "Rosa, are you out there? Please come and show yourself. Then Regent will stop."

"Is there trouble here? Is some one calling?" demanded a masculine voice from the shrubbery out by the front gate. This wasn't Rosa's suitor, with his funny Swedish brogue. The voice that had called was well modulated,—a gentleman's

voice,—and it was a gentleman, very elegant in white tennis flannels, who now came quickly forward, blinking in the bright light of all the porch lamps.

"Your dog doesn't seem to care for strangers," he laughed. "I've been out there in the road for several minutes, wondering if the commotion he was making was just fuss or real trouble. Are you in any trouble? Is there anything that I can do?"

"Nothing, I think, thank you," said Nancy, tugging at Regent's collar. "This silly dog has an idea that something is wrong, and he made me come out to see. I was only talking to him, and then I called to Rosa—that's our maid—thinking he might have heard her talking by the other gate."

"There's no one else anywhere about here, I think," said the man from his place in the shadows on the little path. "Your dog is probably nervous over the fireworks. My collie always runs for the cellar on the evening of July third, and camps there till the last gun is fired."

Nancy glanced over her shoulder at the bay. "I thought the fireworks were over some time ago. Oh!"—as Regent gave a particularly vicious tug at his collar—"I think you'd better go. He's never bitten any one, but he certainly acts queer to-night."

"Only excitement over the fireworks," insisted the man pleasantly, moving off down the path. "Nobody about here, I'm sure. Good-evening, madam."

"Aren't you ashamed, Regent," scolded Nancy, "to be stirring up the whole neighborhood and making strange gentlemen think something dreadful is happening to us? You feel better now, do you?" For the dog had quieted suddenly. "Then let's go into the house, and curl up together on the couch and enjoy ourselves till our absent family returns. But first we've got to call in that Spoiled Kitten which you've scared most to pieces with all your barking."

Nancy had scarcely settled herself with her pacified pets, when the Lee family trouped noisily in, all but Dick, who had stayed behind with Johnny, the Littles, and Cecilia, to enjoy the dancing at the Inn. The children were full of the fireworks, and Nancy forgot to mention Regent's odd behavior until she saw Dick at breakfast next morning.

"Next time you go off and leave me," Nancy told him, "please take your dog, or at least put him to bed. He made such a noise that a strange man came in to ask if I was in trouble."

"He did?" Dick was all interest. "Now maybe you people won't fuss so much about his

chewing a few things up and knocking around the place a bit. Maybe now you'll see that a dog's worth while."

"Worth while!" Nancy scoffed. "He made such a disturbance that I had to get up and go around the piazza with him. And even then he wouldn't stop. I had to hold him with all my strength, while the strange man was talking to me; and it's a great wonder he didn't pull me over and hurt my game ankle."

"It's quite evident," Dick told her loftily, "that you haven't heard the news. The Parkes had burglars last night."

"Burglars!" gasped Nancy.

"Burglars on Halcyon Point!" echoed Mrs. Lee. "With only one road in, and a watchman at the lodge gate to see that no suspicious characters get by, and two policemen to patrol the Point at night. Nancy, I shall never leave you alone again!"

"She's perfectly safe with Regent," asserted Dick. "He evidently heard 'em prowling around, looking for a likely window. Regular porch-climber, the Parkes' burglar was. They found his marks going up a pillar of that rose-trellis thing they have along the back of the house. He climbed up that way, and took out a window-screen. He didn't get much, because Mr. Parke

happened to come home late from the city, and went right up-stairs and scared him off."

"The Smiths at the big house they too haf a tief," the staid Rosa broke into the breakfast conversation. "The milkman say the little girl she scairt mos' to death."

"By a burglar, Rosa?" demanded Dick excitedly.

"Dey tink so," explained Rosa. "Only he don' take nothin'. He chust scare de little girl. Nobody else hear him. But de milkman tell 'em Mister Parke have tief, and the cook she say that's what it is."

"Mr. Parke telephoned the Inn last night for a detective," explained Dick. "That's how the news spread so soon. He wants to get back a pin that Mrs. Parke is fond of—an old one, I guess it was, that had been in the family. And then he says he wants the man caught to protect the other cottagers. I say they'd better all get dogs."

Nancy shivered. "I can't believe any burglars were around here last night. The man who came in to see about Regent's barking said there was nobody else out there. He thought the fireworks had scared Regent. Besides, he does bark sometimes just for mischief, Dick. You know he does."

Dick waved melodramatically at the tangle of

shrubbery that secluded "The Crags" from Lighthouse Road. "Do you really think any one could be sure at night, even after a good thorough search, that a man wasn't hidden in there? This man who heard you calling Rosa and quieting Regent —did he go in there and hunt around? Well, then, why don't you give my dog credit for some sense? He barks occasionally at nothing, I'll admit; but I never knew him to growl unless something was really wrong. I say, Nancy, this fellow who talked to you—maybe he was the burglar!"

"Dick!" Nancy was highly indignant. "He was no more like a burglar than you are. He had on white flannels, and his voice sounded perfectly nice and gentlemanly. He owns a collie himself, he said."

"Stranger things have happened," said Dick oracularly, "than sweet-voiced burglars in white flannels. Were they absolutely and immaculately white, Nancy? Because if he was the Parkes' burglar, I should say he must have climbed their rose-arbor before he talked to you."

"I can't be sure how white his clothes were," said Nancy rather crossly, "because he stood down in the shadow."

"There!" Dick triumphed. "Describe him."

Nancy considered. "He was—about as tall as

you. He didn't look fat. I don't think he had a moustache. He looked and acted perfectly nice and gentlemanly, and he came in from the road because he thought I was in trouble. I saw him coming up from the gate."

"He wasn't your same gallant Green Knight, I suppose?" inquired Dick casually.

"Oh, no!" Nancy assured him. "That boy wouldn't bother about a dog's barking. By all we've seen and all we've heard about him, he's much too unsociable. Besides, it wasn't he; I could see plenty well enough to be sure of that."

"Um—I suppose you're right." Dick got up briskly. "Johnny and Little Peter and I have a date."

"Will you help me to swim to-day, Dick?" demanded Billy anxiously.

"If I'm back in time," Dick promised cautiously. "Can't tell how long we fellows may be busy."

"Where you going, Dick?" piped curious Josephine. "I wanted you to help me to swim too."

"Never you mind where I'm going." Dick strode off importantly.

"Tell the girls to come over and play tennis or something," called Nancy.

"I will, if I see them. Can't keep Johnny waiting forever."

On the edge of tears, Nancy watched him go, heard Peter sing out, "You're late, old man," and the two tramp off together, laughing over something Dick had said. Dick had been so superior about Regent's behavior, and now for him to flaunt a secret! Boys did have such fun! Nancy sat up straight, and thought hard of the little white girl, —more miserable than usual this morning, according to Rosa's account,—and then of Mrs. Miggs's grandchild with her "grit and good sperits." The rule worked. You really couldn't weep because your brother had a secret and forgot to deliver your messages when you thought of the unhappy child at "Gray Gables," or the child with grit and good spirits who would probably never walk again.

"I'm going down to the Birdcage," she told Josephine and Billy, "to make peanut dolls for a little sick girl that Mrs. Miggs knows. Will you two help carry the things I want? And then why don't you go berrying? There must be lots of raspberries over on the moor. Maybe you'd get enough for a shortcake."

The Birdcage was very quiet this morning. Nancy, her chair drawn up to the little table, worked busily at the peanut family. Sure that this time her gift would be appreciated, she took extra pains with the little faces, making some as

absurd and some as lifelike as possible. Upon the dresses, too, Nancy exercised all her ingenuity. She made a clown, a ballet dancer, an absurd creature as nearly as possible like Jane Learned in the costume of the Frabjous Tortoise,[1] a bride,—Nancy tinkled her bell for Rosa to bring her out a tulle bow for the bridal veil,—and lastly twins, dressed in checked gingham with sunbonnets to match.

Nancy set them all up in a row and laughed heartily to herself at the motley array they made. Then instead of merely laying them away in their box, she fastened wires around their necks and strung them up in a dangling row, thus constructing a crude sort of puppet-theater, in which the peanut company disported themselves as she pulled the strings.

Nancy, who still loved childish toys, was playing contentedly with her puppets, planning a play for them to tell Mrs. Miggs about, when her attention was attracted by a snapping sound coming up from the rocks below—the "public rocks" where the little white girl had stood.

Nancy craned her neck to look over the Birdcage railing. A girl was sitting down there alone —a girl older than Nancy—about the age of the Fair Oaks seniors, perhaps, and as pretty as that

[1] See "Nancy Lee."

spoiled senior beauty, Vera Lawson. She was dressed in white, and she wore no hat, but over her head she held a gorgeous parasol of gaily striped silk, tilting it against the sun so that, for Nancy, her face was silhouetted on the bright silk. A book and a bag lay on the rock beside the girl, but she sat doing nothing except staring forlornly out across the bay and throwing little pebbles idly at the big rock in front of her. It was the click of the pebbles on the stone that Nancy had heard.

Nancy gazed down admiringly at the pretty girl in her crisp white clothes under the gay umbrella. Yes, she was even prettier than Vera. There was more poise, more character in her face. Her beauty was of the type that made you sure you wanted to know her—sure you would find her interesting as well as pretty. Nancy wished she would smile. Her soft cheek looked as if it would curve adorably when something pleased her. But instead, quite without warning, she dropped her pretty face on her lap and began, very quietly but quite undisguisedly, to cry.

Nancy drew back, horror-stricken. "You be on the lookout!" Mrs. Miggs had advised her. "You'll find Halcyon Point ain't such a paradise of joy as you might think." Then the Birdcage had revealed the little white girl, and now there

was this tragedy hidden under the flaunting gaiety of a Roman-striped umbrella—tragedy with such a lovely face and such dainty clothes. There was magic in the Birdcage lookout—black magic, revealing misery in the most unlikely places. Nancy felt somehow to blame for the pretty girl's trouble; as if, by being "on the lookout," she had been a cause, and not merely a witness of her woe.

Still the pretty girl cried on; Nancy, drawn back well out of sight from below, leaned cautiously forward occasionally, hoping she would have stopped. Something dreadful must be the matter. Perhaps the girl had heard bad news. Somebody she was fond of had died, or—Vera suggested this—her family objected to the man she loved, or—— Nancy longed to know, longed to comfort the beautiful being. But perhaps she would be crotchety, like the little white girl. Certainly she wouldn't want any one to see her crying. All at once Nancy hit upon a plan, and looked eagerly around for means whereby to execute it. She couldn't risk the peanut dolls; the paste bottle would break, the scissors were too small. It must be the book she had been reading, poor thing! Well, it was a stupid book, and it belonged to Nancy; if it got torn or broken in its fall, nobody else could find fault. Swiftly Nancy leaned forward, lightly she tossed the stupid book over the

railing and down to the rocks, aiming just to one side of the gay umbrella. Then she dodged back and waited; the girl must be given a chance to regain her composure.

"Oh, dear!" said Nancy loudly, after the minute's pause, and leaned cautiously forward. Yes, it was all right to look now; the pretty girl was just giving her flushed cheeks a final dab with her damp handkerchief. She had jumped up and stood staring in a startled way at the steep bank above her.

"Oh!" she gasped when she saw Nancy, "is it your book? I couldn't imagine where it came from."

"I'm so sorry!" Nancy's voice was sweet and eager. She did hope this big unhappy girl would be more friendly than the little unhappy one. "I dropped it somehow, and I can't come down, because I've sprained my ankle. When you come back to the road, would you mind just leaving it on our piazza? I'm sorry to bother you, but it's only a step!"

"I'll bring it right now," said the pretty girl, smiling cordially up at Nancy. "It's no trouble, and you won't want to sit there doing nothing. Which way do I get up to you?"

CHAPTER VII

A WORLD FULL OF QUESTIONS

"No," said the pretty girl decidedly, "I don't like Halcyon very well so far. But then," she added honestly, "it's not the fault of the place."

Upon close inspection she was even prettier than she had looked on the beach, as she sat, a little breathless and disheveled from her climb over the rocks, under the fence, and straight up the Lees' woody bank to the Birdcage. For she had received Nancy's suggestion that she come round by the road with a merry "Oh, what's the use? I always prefer short-cuts."

Nancy smiled at her guest admiringly. "When you know where the prettiest places are, and after you've met more people maybe ——" Nancy hesitated, because the pretty girl was shaking her head decisively.

"Oh, it's not that I'm bored or lonely," she said. "You see," she dimpled again adorably, "you see I—well, I don't feel the need of many people right at present because I've got one person—that is, we've been married almost a month now. We're

spending our honeymoon here—in the little cottage out close by the lighthouse. We've taken it through August."

"What a lovely long honeymoon!" commented Nancy politely, hastily rejecting one hypothesis as to the cause of the girl's tears.

"Yes," said the girl curtly. "Can you cook?"

Nancy nodded. "We had classes at Fair Oaks School, where I went last year, and splendid chances to practice at the week-end parties that Miss Marshall let us have in her bungalow. Of course I can't do anything now but sit, so I'm keeping house for mother—planning all the meals. I think that part is fun too—almost as much fun as the cooking."

"Fun?" queried the pretty girl dubiously. "I think all parts of housekeeping are hard work." She rose suddenly and picked up the gay parasol. "I must be going on."

"Oh, please don't," Nancy begged her. "I'm tired to death of reading. I thank you for bringing the book all the same, but I hoped you'd stay a long while. Of course, though"—she suddenly remembered the honeymoon—"of course you want to get back to your husband."

"Oh, it's not that!" explained the bride hastily. "I mean, he's in town to-day on business. I've been down to the trolley with him, and now I

ought to go home and work." She glanced at her book and her bag. "I brought those along on his account. He was afraid I was going to be lonely, so I pretended I would spend the whole morning on these rocks, which we both love. But really I'm going to sweep and make cake and plan a lot of meals ahead. And then of course he'll be back for dinner to-night, so I want it to be an extra-good one. But perhaps if you're here some other day when I come to the rocks ——"

"Oh, yes, please do come again," Nancy begged her eagerly. "Have you a good story? I can't seem to find any."

The bride held out her book smilingly. "A new treatise on comets by the big French astronomer," she explained. "Want to borrow it?"

"It's not exactly my idea of summer reading," laughed Nancy. "I prefer cook-books."

The pretty bride's face grew suddenly sober. "I wish I did! It's a woman's business to prefer cook-books, isn't it?" And raising the bright parasol, she went off up the little path.

"I beg your pardon, miss." Somebody down on the rocks broke in upon Nancy's wonderments about frivolous-looking brides who read treatises on comets in French, under Roman-striped parasols, and stop reading to weep passionately about—what?

Again Nancy leaned forward over the Birdcage railing. It was the little white girl's nurse.

"Oh, good-morning," Nancy called back to her. "Is Clare sick? We heard how the burglar frightened her last night, and I'm so sorry about it."

"Yes, miss, she's in a state, miss. It was early this morning she got frightened. She's had highsterics most dreadfully, and the doctor says he won't answer for her heart, poor lamb. She says it was no burglar but sperits, miss, talking in her room—moaning and groaning and gibbering like nothing mortal. And they surely left sperits' tracks, which is none at all, miss. So we're quite upset, not knowing what to think, and nothing seeming quite right and reasonable. I've a note for you, miss, but I don't know the house you belong in, and besides it don't seem hardly proper to leave a note at a door when it ain't addressed sensible."

"How is it addressed?" asked Nancy, politely concealing her amusement.

"Lady-Bird-in-a-Cage." The nurse read it out solemnly. "I do think Miss Simms—she that's a governess with book-learning and languages—might have done better than that."

"But she didn't know my name," laughed Nancy, "and that certainly makes it awkward when you have a note to address."

"And awkwarder when you have it to deliver," supplemented the nurse primly.

"Oh, you've delivered it in exactly the right way," Nancy assured her gaily. "This is the Birdcage, you know, this summer-house up where I am. I suppose—no, of course you couldn't tie the note to a stone and throw it up."

"I'm afraid not, miss," said the nurse sadly, "as I have nothing to tie it with."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to go back to the road and in the gate, and—oh, no, I know the way!" Nancy reached a long arm down under the rustic bench and produced a ball of twine. She had had it brought out days ago, to tie up some of the Birdcage vines, and when it had rolled away into a remote corner, she had said "Bother!" and left it where it was. But now the advantage of this was that she could get her note up by holding the end of the string and tossing the ball down to the staring nurse-maid, who cried "My stars!" excitedly and ran forward to catch it.

"You'd better have thrown me the end and kept the ball," she admonished careless Nancy. "But as it is, I can make it fast. I'm to wait for the answer."

Nancy hauled up the ball and the note, and opened the latter eagerly.

"Maybe I'd like to pertend with you," was

printed in a scrawling childish hand. "I liked the funny dolls." Here the writing changed to neat script. "I want to thank you. I am sick. Come and see me. Please.—CLARISSA SMITH."

Below was added:

"Clare grew tired over the note, so I have finished it for her. Judge Smith bids me say that it would be a great favor if you could come to see the child, who must be kept absolutely quiet for some days, and who seems to have taken a fancy to you. He regrets that we do not know your name.—SARAH SIMMS."

"A fancy to me!" murmured Nancy. "How does she act when she dislikes people, I wonder! It must be those dolls she's taken a fancy to." Nancy leaned over the railing. "Oh,"—she broke off with a laugh,—"I don't know your name either, and it certainly is awkward not to. Mine is Nancy Lee."

"I'm Susan, Miss Lee. I'll tell Miss Simms."

"Well, Susan," Nancy went on, "I haven't any paper or pencil out here, and it would keep you too long if I hobbled back to the house and wrote an answer. Besides, I don't know what to say. I don't see how I can go. You know, perhaps, that Clare wants me to come and see her."

"Yes, miss. It's her one request, miss. She's that pitiful, cryin' for her father and shriekin'

with fear of them sperits, and havin' a turn with her heart ever so often."

"But you see, I'm lame," explained Nancy, "and I'm not to try to climb in and out of a carriage or a motor yet. Doctor Jennings says that's the surest way to set the cure back."

"The same would apply to a flying machine, I suppose, miss," said Susan sadly. "Because the Judge would have that or anything else you can name sent round for you. He's that set on pleasing Clare."

"Would she like to have my younger sister come?" suggested Nancy. "She's the one who brought her the dolls."

"I think not, miss. She's never cared for other children."

Nancy considered. "Well, perhaps I can come soon, and this afternoon I'll send her a comical note or something. And perhaps —— You tell her I'm very sorry I can't come right away, and to be on the lookout for a grand surprise."

"Yes, miss, and thank you. It's diverting she needs, the doctor says. But with her mother dead long ago and now her father marrying again and shipping her off—and me with her—like so many old clothes he's ashamed of, and she idolizing her father that's always idolized her and spoiled her something shameful, so her grandfather says she's

a little savage, and Miss Simms says if things goes on like this, she'll have to leave —— Oh, it's a beautiful time for me, miss, held responsible as I am, in a way, for Clare's tempers. How I do run on! Good-day, miss, and thank you for Clare and Judge Smith too."

It was fortunate for Nancy Lee that Mrs. Miggs arrived by appointment soon after Susan's departure, for Nancy wanted nothing so much as to relieve her mind.

"Your rule doesn't work, Mrs. Miggs," she informed that little lady sternly.

Mrs. Miggs gave a bird-like start of astonishment. "You don't say now! What rule are you referrin' to, Miss Nancy?"

"About being on the lookout," explained Nancy. "You told me to hunt around for other people that had troubles, and I wouldn't mind mine. Well, I didn't expect to find any others, but I needn't have worried. I've found two already, besides the one you told me of. And now my little girl has been terribly frightened and is sick and wants me to come and see her. And the pretty bride I've discovered to-day wouldn't tell me what was the matter, so I want to go and see her and find out. I just can't stand it to stay still here much longer. Being on the lookout—it doesn't make you contented! It just

stirs you up and makes you want to do things for people."

"I notice you ain't crying about it, all the samey," chuckled Mrs. Miggs.

Nancy chuckled too. "No, and I don't feel a bit like crying. But I do feel all stirred up and as if I positively couldn't stand to sit around and let things go on without me. Can't you think of a remedy for that, Mrs. Miggs? Can't I go out driving to-morrow?"

Mrs. Miggs's black bonnet bobbed agitatedly. "You ask Doctor Sammy, and don't say I advised it, either. My remedy is, you get somebody else on the lookout—somebody to do the walking, while you do the watching. Can't you?"

Nancy considered. "The children are too young, and Dick's certainly no use with the two people I've discovered so far. And mother would say 'You absurd child!' about the pretty bride, and if Clare was rude to her I should feel sorry I'd asked her to go there. Maybe the girls next door——"

"The very ones!" twittered Mrs. Miggs eagerly. "They'll be jest as interested as you be. But don't you go urgin' Doctor Sammy to let you out too soon. He's easy-goin' by nature. Don't you tease him. I'll be round day after to-morrow, when I hope not to be so rushed, and then I'll

hear all about the new case you've discovered, and I'll tell you about my grandchild and those dolls. Did you say this new case was a bride? I admire to hear of brides, and I notice they ain't always blissfully happy, either. But a reely miserable bride is a thing I never come acrost, I'm happy to state."

When Cecilia and Alexandra appeared, not long before luncheon, their obvious purpose was to secure Dick for an afternoon tennis-match.

"Peter's gone off and wouldn't promise to play," explained Cecilia, "but if Dick will and Peter won't, we are going to telephone John Andrews."

"They're all three off together," Nancy informed them, "and Dick wouldn't tell me where he was going. I don't believe you can count on any of them. Besides, I've got a lovely plan that would take up your afternoon." And without bringing in Mrs. Miggs or the Birdcage—still a secret from the young people next door—Nancy told them about the little white girl's forlorn plight and then about the tearful bride, who hated housekeeping and who was spending a lonely day out at the cottage by the lighthouse.

"So," concluded Nancy, "I thought if Alexandra would go to see Clare and take her a comical message from me, and show her how to make a puppet-theater out of her peanut dolls,—because

she can play that way so nicely in bed,—and Cecilia, if you'd go out and call on that girl and feel around to find out if there's any trouble out there that we can help about,—why, I should be of some use in the world. I had a feeling that the bride wanted to tell me something, only she couldn't quite make up her mind to. She's dear, Cecilia, and Clare is sort of winning somehow, though she's so naughty. I'm dying to see the inside of 'Gray Gables' myself."

Nancy chattered on swiftly, fighting against the constrained silence that seemed to have enveloped the two cousins.

"Oh, Nancy, I couldn't go to see that queer child," began Alexandra finally. "You say she's a peevish, irritable little thing. I should hate her. I don't care for children unless they're very attractive. And then the 'Gray Gables' people are so awfully rich that it would seem like pushing in to go there."

"Well, I'm sure Aunt May wouldn't let me go to call on a strange family," put in Cecilia. "She's very particular. Besides, I should feel so silly. What could I say when I got there?"

"Oh, Cecilia, you can always think of plenty to say," urged Nancy. "That's why I picked you out for the bride. And Alexandra makes beautiful animal pictures. She did some one day for

Bill and Joe. I'm sure any child would love them." Nancy felt suddenly that her case was lost. "But of course if you don't want to do it, let's not think any more about it," she went on bravely. "And as soon as Dick comes, I'll ask him about playing tennis. He'll run over and let you know."

"You aren't peeved with us, Nancy?" asked Alexandra anxiously. "You see, it looks different to you, because you know these people."

"Um—yes, of course," agreed Nancy. "Only —well, I guess I can't explain it. If Jane Learned was here, she'd make you crazy to go."

"Not me," declared cock-sure Cecilia. "But who's Jane Learned?"

"She's a girl I knew at Fair Oaks School," explained Nancy. "She's one of the Learned twins —the big one. She's tall and lank and awkward. Her hair is straight and sandy and it won't stay fixed."

"Why doesn't she curl it?" demanded Alexandra, smoothing her carefully waved hair, kept in perfect order by a scarcely visible net.

Nancy laughed. "She won't bother. Looks aren't Jane's strong point. She leaves them to Christina, the little twin."

"Um!" mused Cecilia, tossing her head with its loosely arranged, rather untidy tresses. "I hate

bothering with nets and things. Aunt May is always scolding me for not bothering more. But I do like to get stylish lines. Just now this French twist is all the rage."

"I wish you'd learn to do it properly," cut in Alexandra. "Yours is more of a French snarl."

Cecilia shrugged. "All right. Only what I wish is that Nancy would tell us why the highly unattractive person named Jane Learned would make us—you at least—want to do queer things."

Nancy considered. "I don't know why. She likes queer things herself, and she makes them seem so fascinating that you forget they're queer."

Cecilia considered. "Is she popular with boys?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Nancy told her. "I never saw her with any except once when she visited me, and then I was having too much fun to notice."

"She sounds freaky," declared Cecilia.

"C. I!" Alexandra remonstrated.

"If she does"—Nancy struggled hard to keep her temper—"it's because I can't make you see her any better than I can make you see what I mean about going to call on Clare and the bride."

"Yes, that's all the trouble," agreed Cecilia placidly, rising to go. "You say this Jane is wonderful, but you don't make us see it. You won't forget to give our message to Dick, will you?"

"I for one should like to meet your friend, Nancy," added Alexandra, as she followed Cecilia.

"But she said it just for politeness," thought Nancy hotly, when they were gone. "Oh, how I wish the twins were here! I wonder if mother would mind my having them."

"Hi, Nancy Lee!" It was Dick, back from his mysterious expedition. "I say, I'm going to tell Rosa to hustle up luncheon. I want to get back to my job."

"Cecilia and Alexandra want you to play tennis this afternoon, Dick. I said you'd let them know." Nancy delivered the message faithfully the moment Dick appeared back from his mission to Rosa.

"Bother tennis!" Dick was too excited to maintain his distant pose of the morning. "I tell you, I've got a job—and thereby hangs a tale that would make your hair curl, Nancy Lee, if it wasn't pretty kinky already. For unless Little Peter and Johnny Andrews and myself are highly mistaken, you've seen Halcyon's burglar. In fact, you know more about him than anybody in these parts."

"Oh, Dick! That nice polite man in white clothes! You're absurd."

Dick shrugged and smiled at his sister loftily through half closed eyes. "That theory is pretty well exploded, my child. As we three fellows

were on our way over to examine the porch-climber's marks on the Parkes' pergola, we saw something that gave us another clue. And on the strength of it we've been hired by the august owner of 'Gray Gables' to 'pursue our investigation, and if anything comes of it to send the bill to him and not be afraid to charge top-prices, either.' I'm quoting his august judgeship's exact words."

"Oh, Dick, do begin at the beginning!" implored Nancy. "Of course you know very well that I can't understand you when you mix everything up like this."

"Well, exercise a little imagination, my child," suggested Dick blandly.

"I haven't any," sighed Nancy. "Please, Dick!"

"All right." Dick thawed obligingly, as his eye fell on Nancy's bandaged ankle. "I'll tell you exactly what happened, seeing it's you. I mean seeing it was you who really discovered this clue. Well, I mean if it hadn't been for your running on to him a while ago we never should have thought of trailing this suspect. But promise you won't tell the other girls."

"Certainly not," Nancy promised with a good deal of inward satisfaction. "Hadn't you better rush over and tell them you won't play tennis, Dick?"

"I guess they'll gather it pretty fast from Little Peter," chuckled Dick. "If you think I'm a bit excited, you should see him."

"Oh, Dick, please begin," begged Nancy.

"All right." Dick settled himself to a business-like recital. "We fellows planned last night, when we heard about the Parkes' burglary, to go over this morning and look at the porch-climber's tracks. We'd never seen any. And this morning after I'd heard about your experiences with my dog, I told the fellows that, after we'd seen them, we'd come back here and hunt for more to match. That wouldn't absolutely fasten the guilt on White-Flannels, but it would prove that Regent wasn't a fool."

"Well, have you found some marks here?" demanded Nancy impatiently.

"Haven't looked yet. I will, though, after I've finished this tale that you're so crazy to interrupt. We were going along by Fresh Pond on that little short-cut path, when we saw somebody moving down in the bushes. Peter thought it was a boy going for pond-lilies, and he yelled to him to take some to their house, because his mother was anxious to have some. The fellow ducked down among the tall bushes and when he was well out of sight he yelled back, 'Sorry, but I have no lilies.' He was so very mysterious, ducking down like, that we got curious—Johnny specially. So

we did a bit of scouting off the path and down through the tangle of shrubs until we got in sight of our man. We watched him for a whole long hour by Johnny's ticker, and it didn't seem a minute. Guess who he was."

"The Green Knight, of course," supplied Nancy breathlessly.

"Now you're getting on a bit," nodded Dick approvingly. "He had on his badge of office all right, including the feather. He also had a tape-line, a coil of rope, a compass, and a big sheet of paper. He'd just got down there, evidently, when Peter yelled to him. Well, first he spread the paper out on a flat stone, and laid on a lot of pebbles to keep it flat—he was fussy about its being perfectly smooth. Then he knelt down in front of it and stared for a while, first at the paper and then at the surrounding scenery. He almost saw us once, when he turned suddenly to look behind him. Well, after a while he went up to a thorn-apple tree not far from the edge of the pond. He crawled in under the branches and fastened his rope to a stump near the trunk. Then he laid down the rope on the ground in a line from the stump to a big rock on the shore of Fresh Pond. Then he ran back and forth with his tape-line, measuring the distance, we took it. Then he stared some more at the paper, and went through

the whole performance again, starting from another stump this time, near the thorn-apple. When he got back to his paper again, he stopped his whistling, which he'd been at steadily since he began his performance, and he said, 'Oh, shucks!' so loud that we could hear. Then, after he'd waited a while, he said, 'Crickets!' And then he started all over again, from a willow tree close to the edge of the pond. We left then, because Little Peter still wanted to go to the Parkes' and see the burglar's tracks."

"Do look and see if we've got some too!" begged impetuous Nancy.

"You wait!" adjured Dick. "The best of this tale is yet to come. That old millionaire that's owned 'Gray Gables' for ten years and never saw it till last week, so he told us, was over at the Parkes' too, looking at the burglar's trail. He's a funny old fellow—acts more like a jumping jack than a judge. But every jump he makes counts, and you can see in two minutes that he's smart enough to get a million dollars or anything else he specially wants."

"How exciting to have talked to a real live millionaire!" sighed Nancy enviously.

"He didn't talk at first," amended Dick. "He just ran around and looked and muttered to himself. Then all of a sudden—Mr. Parke was in

town and Mrs. Parke had gone into the house for something—he ran up to Little Peter. 'Very queer burglar, this!' he said. 'Why so, sir?' asked Peter. The old man acted awfully mad about something. 'One moment, if you please,' he roared, as if he thought Peter had said something he shouldn't."

"Oh, Dick!" Nancy broke in excitedly. "That's just like our John Smith—Boss Smith, you know, out at Camp Sixty-Nine, where Timmy lives. He hated to have you ask questions. He wanted you to wait and see what he had to say."

Dick nodded. "Judge Smith is just like that. After he'd stared at Peter hard enough to bore holes in him ——"

"Oh, Dick, that's exactly like Boss Smith! Do you suppose they can possibly ——"

"No, silly!" Dick cut her short. "The Smith family is too big to have its family resemblances count for much. Besides, the point of my story is that after he'd bored enough holes to please him in Peter, he turned and bored a few in Johnny and me, only Johnny wasn't at all rattled by his performances. Then he asked us if we were together and we said yes, and then he asked us what was our connection with the case, and Johnny winked at Peter and me and said we were detectives from the city. Now, don't look shocked,

Nancy Lee. That's perfectly true, and it wasn't necessary to say that we were only amateur detectives, or that our families were spending the summer here."

"No-o-o." Nancy was still rather doubtful. "But it didn't give a very true impression."

Dick chuckled. "It certainly impressed Judge Smith all right, exactly as we hoped it would. He looked hard at us for a while longer, and then he asked us if we had time to come over to his place and he'd tell us what happened there. Of course we went. His burglar,—if he was a burglar,—took nothing. Nobody heard him but the little girl, who sleeps on the top floor in a big room with six windows. Her nurse-maid, who sleeps next door and ran in when the child screamed, thought perhaps there was a queer noise mixed with the first scream she heard. The little girl said it wasn't a human voice—it was a ghost's. She must be a queer kid. She's always lived in Italy and South America, and she speaks lots of languages and believes all the stuff that an old Italian nurse taught her. The old man is hot about that idiotic nurse, as he calls her. But at the same time he's sure the little girl heard something, and didn't just dream it. We fellows size it up that he heard something himself, only he thinks it wouldn't be becoming for a judge and

a millionaire to get himself mixed up with a ghost story."

"Well?" questioned Nancy, as Dick appeared to be lost in meditation.

"Oh, yes!" Dick came back to the situation with a start. "Did I say we were out on the road all this time? Judge Smith didn't want to do anything to stir up that little girl, so he decided not to take us inside, where she might see us. Well, all of a sudden Johnny said to the old Judge: 'Sir, do you think this is the work of a professional?' 'I do not,' snapped the Judge. 'Well, neither do I,' said Johnny—snapping-turtle manners and cutting stares can't put anything over on Johnny, you know. 'And moreover,' he said, 'we already have a clue, my partners and I, and I doubt if any other detectives that may be working on the case have noted it. Now, how would you like to have us follow it up for you?' We were awfully proud of Johnny, though we didn't know what in the world he meant. Well, the upshot was the Judge snorted and poohed and said good-bye, and then ran back and engaged us to catch whatever was haunting 'Gray Gables' on the night of July Fourth."

"But what was Johnny's clue?" demanded Nancy anxiously.

Dick stared at her in resentful wonder. "Can't

you put two and two together?" he demanded in his turn. And then, as the children came running from the house, he closed the subject with a solemn warning. "Not a breath of this to anybody, remember. I only told you because—oh, to let off steam, I guess."

But Nancy, woman-like, tried for the last word. "Oh, Dick," she whispered, "you don't think my nice Green Knight is a burglar? He can't be. I don't see ——"

"Neither do I—yet," snapped Dick. "But he's our clue."

CHAPTER VIII

A RIDE IN A SEDAN CHAIR

THE Learned twins were coming to Halcyon to visit Nancy Lee! They had been asked and had accepted long before the day when Nancy, despairing of playing her lookout game alone, and finding Cecilia and Alexandra provokingly unresponsive, had decided that she needed—oh, bitterly needed!—Jane's genius for making the commonplace picturesque and the picturesque supremely fascinating. On one of those first miserable days before Mrs. Miggs came to start Nancy off with her challenging "You be on the lookout!" Mrs. Lee had written the twins.

"Poor Nancy was hunting for me on the rocks," she told them, "to ask my permission to invite you here for a fortnight's visit, when she sprained her ankle. So you see we are all three a little responsible, and the sooner you can come the better."

Jane was in favor of starting immediately on receipt of Mrs. Lee's appeal, but Christina insisted upon ten days' delay. "We need some pretty new summer clothes," she declared, "and if Nancy is

going to be laid up for a month at least and perhaps longer, she'll enjoy us just as much in ten days as she will now, and perhaps even more."

The course of events proved how right was little Christina's theory. For the ten days were nearly gone before Nancy, overwhelmed by a longing for some really sympathetic spirits, timidly hinted at what she wanted so much, and was met with her mother's laughing rejoinder, "My dear, I was beginning to wonder if I'd made a mistake in asking the Learneds to come. I'm really much relieved to find that you still want them, in spite of the friends you've made next door and all the things you've found to do for me and the children."

"Mother," said Nancy solemnly, "I'm trying to do my duty, and the girls next door are fun enough, but the twins are just pure joy—gulps of joy, as that funny Hope Haskins would say."

There were still two days to wait, and they seemed long to Nancy, with nobody to be feet for her in the Lookout cases. So she was delighted, when, early on the second afternoon, Hope Haskins trilled her unmistakable "whu-whu" along the road and appeared herself at the Lees' door a moment later.

"I have an afternoon off," she beamed joyously. "A whole one! I'm going to walk around the

Point, stopping at all the loveliest places. This is my first stop."

"Then I suppose you want to rush right out to the Birdcage," laughed Nancy.

"Oh, could we?" Hope's great brown eyes flashed with delight. "You see," she explained, as she danced along by Nancy's side down the woodsy path, "you see, I needn't even be back at five to-day. My tables have both gone on a picnic. I packed them up a perfectly beautiful supper. I was so grateful to them for all going the same night!"

"But isn't this a Dolphin afternoon?" asked Nancy.

Hope nodded solemnly. "Yes. But I knew Miss Willis would be glad to let me off and save my pay. In fact, I'm expecting any day to have her tell me that I'm not needed any longer. I'm not, you know. Do you think I ought to tell her so, Nancy, instead of waiting for her to tell me?"

"I don't understand," parried Nancy. "Has there been some trouble?"

"One big trouble," announced Hope somberly, settling herself in the chair opposite Nancy's and staring off dreamily at the shimmering bay. "The trouble with that shop is that it stays so new. I used to think at home, where all our things are old and shabby and worn out,—I used

to think that to have all new things—good new things that would stay new—would be too splendid for anything. But it's not, always. Oh, no!" sighed Hope, her eyes deep pools of woe. "In this case, if I saw the Dolphin things beginning to look worn out and shabby—if the pretty new dishes were nicked or the shiny new floor was scratched—I should be glad! Miss Willis would be glad!"

"Is it a pretty shop?" asked Nancy.

"Oh, it's sweet! The tea-room has little low round tables and spindly-backed chairs,—Miss Willis calls them Windsor chairs, I think,—and a beautiful shining row of old brass things above the fireplace, and flowers growing in all the windows and blossoming on all the tables. And then there's a big screened-in piazza with wicker tables —tiffin-tables is the name for those. The top of each one is a tray that lifts out, and the shelf below is another tray that lifts out. I love to work those trays," sighed Hope blissfully, "because they're so convenient, and the people are generally so surprised when you begin lifting them around."

"If ever I can come and see your shop, I'll eat on the piazza and let you work the trays for me," Nancy assured her. "And I'll smash a cup, Hope, and dig my heels into the floor," she added laughingly, "if you think that will help any."

"Your coming will help," said Hope soberly. "Every one who comes helps just so much. But it's dreadfully slow getting started, and the fixed expenses go right on. I'm a fixed expense, except to-day, of course, when I asked to be let off; and I think I'm unnecessary. With business as bad as it's been so far, Miss Willis could get along without me perfectly well. I'm glad I didn't tell her how I was counting on my money. I guess, from something she said, that she'd been counting on what she expected to make just as hard as I was counting on mine."

"You started to tell me about your saving up to go to college," Nancy suggested. "You mentioned it the day we first met."

"Oh, of course I would!" laughed Hope. "Everybody who knows me knows about college. Why, I believe even the cows and pigs and chickens on our farm know about it. Dolly, our horse, certainly does. I used to talk of it to her every morning as we jogged along through the Cheney woods on the way to school. It was pretty dark and lonesome in there, if you didn't have something nice to think about and somebody to tell it to."

"You've been planning on going for a long while, then?"

"Oh, yes—for four years,—almost ever since I

entered the Sherwin Hollow High School. The Hollow is five miles from the Corners, where we live. The first year I had to walk it, unless I happened to get a lift, but after that father spared me Dolly."

"Goodness!" Nancy's face was a study in astonishment. "Do you really want to go to college as much as that? As much as a ten-mile walk every day for a year?"

Hope nodded smilingly. "For four years, if they couldn't have spared me Dolly."

"Why?" demanded Nancy curiously. "Do you expect to have such a splendid time there?"

"I expect," said Hope, sitting forward on the edge of her chair, "I expect to find things out there. I expect to learn to be wise. And no matter what happens to you or how poor you are or how hard you have to work in this world, if you know things you can be useful and happy. Of course," Hope explained conscientiously, "you can be a wise person without going to college. Uncle Luke Parsons, who keeps the store at the Corners, is the kind of person I mean, and he never went to school but two terms in his life. But it seems as if college was the surest way, specially as then I can get a good place to teach after I've graduated, and be able to help them at home." Hope sighed. "It's awfully hard to make a farm

pay—if it's a little, hilly, rocky kind of farm, and if everything was shabby to start with. Father works dreadfully hard, and mother just slaves, and we five children help all we can. Sometimes I feel mean to be here now, having such a beautiful time and planning to use all the money for myself. And then I think that maybe my wanting an education so much is a sign that I can use it. So," Hope laughed, "I've adopted the owl as my sacred bird, and the owl's hoot for my call, and I shall try not to be terribly disappointed if Miss Willis has to let me go and I have to wait a year before I can enter college."

"Nancy, Nancy! Where are you?" It was mother's voice.

"In the Birdcage, mother!" Nancy signaled back. "Oh, I'm glad you've come," she cried, as Mrs. Lee appeared, "because I want to ask you——" She pulled her mother's head down to whisper something in her ear.

"Certainly, dear," agreed Mrs. Lee cordially and turned to Hope. "Nancy thinks perhaps you would stay for dinner with us. Will you? Nancy, please read your note. A most impressive servant in livery is standing at attention on the piazza waiting for your answer."

Nancy read:

"MISS LEE:

"*Dear Madam*:—As you know, my granddaughter, Clarissa Smith (an *enfant terrible*, but with some excuse), commands your presence at 'Gray Gables.' (Commands is quite literal, I regret to state.) Your physician distrusts the possible jolting of horse-drawn vehicles or motor-cars. He has no such objection to the Sedan chair. I have therefore borrowed one for the occasion from a museum where I possess some influence. It awaits your pleasure, accompanied by trusty bearers, who will bring you to 'Gray Gables' now, or return to get you at any hour specified. When no modern invention fills the bill, we must revert to the past.

"Yours respectfully, JOHN SMITH.

"Clarissa has been howling at the top of her lungs for an hour, because I let my men eat their dinners before unpacking the chair and starting on their errand. If you came back with them, a second such explosion might be averted."

"Oh, mother, what is a Sedan chair?" cried Nancy, breaking in upon her mother's talk with Hope. "And where is this one? And what shall I do about going in it?" She thrust the note at them. "Read it, both of you."

"A Sedan chair is the electric runabout of the eighteen-thirties," Mrs. Lee explained laughingly. "You must have seen one, daughter, in a museum or in some old print."

"Oh, yes, Nancy, in old pictures, with beautiful

ladies ready for a party stepping into them!" broke in Hope eagerly. "Little high boxes, with windows on the sides for the ladies to peep out through, and poles for the men to carry them by. And always gallant gentlemen bowing the ladies out and in."

Nancy went off in a paroxysm of laughter. "I know what you mean. Just imagine me riding in a thing like that up Lighthouse Road and down Fresh Pond Trail. Why, it's absurd!"

"I think it's lovely!" said Hope.

"Judge Smith must have an extraordinarily fertile imagination," put in Mrs. Lee. "And he must be very fond of that '*enfant terrible*' to go to so much trouble to satisfy her whims. I'm afraid you really ought to go now, Nancy, if Hope will excuse you for a while."

"Oh, I've thought that all out," announced Hope practically. "Of course you'd go now—you wouldn't take the chance of postponing a ride in a Sedan chair. And I'll walk around the Point, as I planned at first, and come back to supper, if you really want me to. I'm honestly glad it's happened that I can get in both the walk and the supper, because my chances for rocks and pools are so very uncertain."

Twenty minutes later the dwellers on Halcyon Point were treated to the unusual spectacle of a

genuinely antique Sedan chair, which had been brought to "The Crags," with its four bearers, in the "Gray Gables" motor-truck, being gingerly carried along the shore roads by a perspiring gardener, an embarrassed chauffeur, an irate butler, and an amused young secretary. None of the four could see Nancy—this was the secretary's one regret,—and Nancy could not see them, as she sat, convulsed with laughter, on the narrow straight-backed seat, her ankle buried in a nest of pillows which strewed the bottom of the chair.

"Oh, Hope ought to be riding here!" thought Nancy. "She'd imagine she was some famous lady in history going to some famous place. I can't do anything but giggle at the ridiculousness of everything."

It was a hot, drowsy hour of early afternoon, and most of the dwellers on Halcyon Point missed the sight of Nancy's strange progress. But down in the swamp by Fresh Pond a boy's sharp eyes spied the queer cavalcade, and the boy dashed at top speed up the bushy slope to the road to investigate. Being very fond of reading history, the boy recognized the Sedan chair instantly, and his jaw dropped in amazement as he stood by the roadside watching this curious anachronism move toward him. His fascinated gaze drew Nancy's, and she recognized her Green Knight. Peering out of the

little window, she nodded brightly, and the boy, after a moment of frowning wonderment, nodded back at her and pulled off his green cap with a flourish. He was certainly a nice-looking boy. He didn't look a bit queer or freaky. He was frankly curious and amused at the Sedan chair, and Nancy felt sure that if she knew how to stop her bearers—and dared to use her knowledge—the Green Knight would come and open the chair door and talk with her in the most sociable fashion. It was perfectly ridiculous to think that he had anything to do with the Parkes' burglary or the "Gray Gables" scare. Nancy resolved to make Dick see this at the earliest opportunity. It wasn't nice to track a strange boy around and try to pin horrid meanings to all his silly little amusements. Dick and Johnny and Little Peter were hidden down by the pond now, probably, watching him. Nancy chuckled delightedly to think how angry they must be because they couldn't come up, too, to investigate her queer equipage. She hoped the Green Knight would stumble on them, on his way back to whatever he was doing, and embarrass them fearfully.

"Well, Miss Lee, where there's a will there's a way! Anybody who knows me knows that I generally get what I want. But I work pretty hard for most of it."

They had turned in under the porte-cochère of "Gray Gables," the bearers had halted, and, just as in Hope's account of Sedan chairs, a gallant gentleman had flung open the chair door. Only he was, perhaps, a little old to fit into the picture.

"Oh!" cried Nancy Lee delightedly at sight of him. "I thought maybe it was you all the time, but Dick said it couldn't be."

"Humph!" said "Jno." Smith who had "interests" in Pine Ridge, Michigan, and who had engineered the return of Timmy Lee Marshall Raftery,—"Boss" Smith, whose telegrams and letters, with their finicky, feminine beginnings and their bold, magisterial conclusions, had kept the spring term at Fair Oaks in a state of pleasant excitement. "Humph!" said Judge Smith, millionaire owner of Halcyon's show-place, which he had never troubled to visit till this summer. "I don't know who in thunder Dick is, but you're the one who asked the most questions out at Pine Ridge. I know *you!*"

Nancy caught a twinkle in his keen eyes. "Is Clare the grandchild that was a caution or the one you hadn't ever seen?" she demanded.

"She's both!" roared Judge Smith. "The other caution is a tame—a tame robin compared to Clare. But then Clare's sick. Clare's lonesome. She's been brought up like a little savage by a fa-

ther that —— Well, he's my son, so I'm doing my best by Clare. Carter,"—he turned abruptly to the secretary,—" my granddaughter's cot is out by the second fountain; take this young lady there. Help her out with great care. Return when she tells you to. I'll be back from Michigan some time next week. Good-bye, Miss Lee."

Before she had time to ask a word about Timmy, the chair door swung shut and Nancy was swaying down a gravel path, through shrubberies, past rose arbors and rock gardens, to the shady nook, where, beside a splashing fountain that dripped out of a mossy wall into a pool of pink water-lilies, the little white girl lay listlessly on her little white cot. She hardly looked at the Sedan chair. She never smiled when Nancy leaned out with a gay greeting.

" Thank you for those little dolls," she murmured faintly, when Nancy was established in a chair by her side. " I liked those little dolls. Susan said the ghost came 'cause I'm so naughty. So I say thank you now every time."

" I'll show you a nice way to play with the dolls, if you'll give me the box," said Nancy, wrung with pity for the frightened, white-faced little creature. " A way you can play in bed."

The child shook her head. " I wanter play pertend. You said it was fun. Do you know how?"

" Why, yes, I know how. Shall I be a grown-up

lady, and you be another grown-up lady, and the dolls can be our families?"

Again the child shook her head. "You be a ghost and go and hide in the bushes and scream. I know it was a ghost I heard. My nurse Annunciata said ——"

"I don't know how to do that kind of pretend," Nancy announced briskly. "Did you ever go to the theater and see a play?"

"Oh, yes!" The child clasped her hands excitedly. "Oh, with my own father in London, to see a play about a little boy—a little boy with wings, and he had a little house up in the sky ——"

"I know him," Nancy broke in quickly. "His name was Peter Pan, wasn't it? I thought so. He's the loveliest pretend-boy that ever was. Don't you think my little house that I call 'The Birdcage' is a good deal like his?"

"No!" The little white girl's scorn was scathing. "Why can't you be a ghost and scream?"

"Because I don't know how to pretend that," Nancy insisted. "Ghosts are a very horrid kind of pretend, I think, Clare. There's nothing real about them, you know. When you think you hear them, it's not so. When you think you see them, that's not so either. But I'll show you how to have a lovely play with the dolls. The box can

be the theater. If we had the dolls, and some string ——"

"Annunciata said there were ghosts," persisted the tired little voice. "And Susan said ——"

"Susan was just teasing you, darling," broke in the nurse sadly. "I've told you so over and over. And I never will tease again, no matter how rude you speak to me. I was only joking."

"Annunciata was joking too, I think," Nancy took up the tale. "She was trying to amuse you with stories ——"

"All right," agreed the child wearily. "You can show me about the theater if you want to." She brightened a little when Nancy made the puppets dance. She even smiled when Nancy promised her a Peter Pan doll, with wings, to add to the collection.

"I guess your mother would like you to go home now," she announced presently.

"Oh, Clare," interposed Susan. "That's no way to treat Miss Lee, when she's taken all the trouble to come here in that outlandish cart."

"Grandfather had all the trouble about that, Susan," corrected Clare acutely, "and he only did it because I cried so. It makes me worse to cry," she concluded complacently.

"I really must go now," Nancy assured Susan, who went off after the Sedan chair.

"I thought of course you could pertend a ghost," the child sighed, when Susan was out of ear-shot.

Impulsively Nancy reached down and gathered the thin little mite in her strong young arms. "I can only pretend real things, Clare—ladies and birds with broken wings and—and any real things. Ghosts aren't anything, Clare. If you ever think you hear one or see one, you just remember that. They're not anything at all. So don't you ever be scared about seeing one or hearing one. Now you'll remember, won't you?"

"I'll try to." The child snuggled close in Nancy's arms. "Only, when I was little, I was so sure—Annunciata said ——"

"Never you mind her!" Nancy insisted. "Your mother never said so. Mothers are the ones to go by. My mother told me, and that's how I know. Remember."

Susan was coming back. Clare stiffened a little, and wriggled away from Nancy.

"You come again," she ordered imperiously, "and bring that doll. Soon, 'cause I might forget what you said. My mother never told me anything."

Nancy rode back in the Sedan chair with no consciousness of its absurdity. She was too busy thinking how to put wings on a peanut doll. Perhaps Hope could invent a way. As she liked

mermaids, she probably liked fairies also, and Peter Pan was a kind of fairy. "Oh, dear, it's awfully easy to promise things!" sighed Nancy Lee.

CHAPTER IX

THE DINNER PARTY

But there was no time to consult Hope about the winged doll. To be sure, she came down Lighthouse Road just behind the Sedan chair, joyously reveling in its quaintness all the way. But at the very same minute, across from the house next door strolled Cecilia Green and Alexandra Little, and walked up on the piazza with an unmistakable air of being expected. They were dressed up, too. Cecilia had on the pink dress that she had worn to the Fourth of July dance at the Inn, and Alexandra wore a filmy white linen, crusted over with the daintiest of hand-embroidery and set off by a wide rose-colored girdle. Mrs. Lee came out to meet them all.

"You're coming at exactly the right time, all of you." She beamed around the circle, after she had introduced Hope and the neighbors. "Nancy, I've enlarged your party to four. Dick, I found, is staying for dinner with the Andrews family, and the children insist upon my taking them for a picnic. Nancy, their favorite companion on such

excursions, can't go. So, as I thought you and Hope would rattle around here all by yourselves, I asked these girls to come over and keep you company."

"That's very nice." Nancy smiled cordially at the two added guests, but inwardly she felt decidedly perturbed. She liked Cecilia and Alexandra—especially Alexandra, with her little shy, sweet way of lingering behind to explain some impulsive utterance of her thoughtless cousin's. But Hope's eyes—and Hope's queer fancies—and Hope's gulps of joy—they didn't somehow fit with Cecilia's evidently regretful surprise that Dick was to be away this evening, nor with the puzzled, appraising glance that Alexandra bestowed on the strange girl's wispy, straw-colored hair and faded, old-fashioned blue dress.

"Alexandra never noticed her eyes!" sighed Nancy, and began a valiant struggle to make her dinner-party a success.

She made them all laugh over the Sedan chair and Judge Smith's manners, and gasp at the strange coincidence that involved the home-coming of Timmy. Noticing that Alexandra was not much interested in Timmy, Nancy heroically suppressed a desire to talk about him for the rest of the evening, told them about Clare, and then, for Cecilia's special benefit, doubled back to her en-

counter with the Green Knight. And that led inevitably to the story of Nancy's being rescued by him on Baxter's Reef.

"How romantic!" sighed Cecilia, thoroughly interested at last. "You certainly ought to have stopped and talked to him to-day, Nancy. You say your mother wants to see him again. You ought to have asked him over here, with that as an excuse. Do get hold of him! Now that our boys are off so much, it's dull as dull here."

"Do you have all day to do as you like in?" inquired Hope solemnly.

"Why, yes, of course," Cecilia told her. "Unless Aunt May wants something of us—like arranging flowers for the house or an errand down at Rocky Neck. Why?"

"Oh, I was just wondering"—Hope's eyes were dreamy—"how long it would be before I should find it dull here, without boys. I think boys are lots of fun, but when I can have the sea, I don't care for anything else. Just me and the tide-pools and the rocks and the wet wind in my face—— Oh, I had the most blissful walk to-day, Nancy, but the sea-anemones have moved away."

"Had any mermaids moved in in their places?" demanded Nancy quizzically.

Hope flushed. "How did you know that I'd named that particular pool the Mermaid's Delight,

Nancy? I'm sure it's the loveliest sea-pool in the whole world."

"What are you two talking about?" demanded Cecilia rather impatiently, and Nancy explained how she had made friends with Hope by showing her all the loveliest spots on Baxter's Reef.

"I've heard about that rock, but I haven't cared about going out there," said Cecilia indifferently. "I suppose I've outgrown liking to climb around on rocks."

"We've been to the shore every year for so long, you see." Alexandra turned to Hope in pretty apology. "That's what Cecilia means."

"And I never saw the ocean till this summer," Hope, in her turn, explained brightly. "So I suppose all my raptures are silly, but oh, I just can't seem to suppress them!"

This time Alexandra couldn't help noticing Hope's eyes, and remembering that she had seen them before, and that Peter, who noticed things like that more than she, had spoken about seeing just such blazing brown eyes down at the Inn and wished he knew their owner.

"I wonder"—Alexandra smiled again at Hope, —"I wonder where I've met you before. I'd just decided that it was at Maponset summer before last, but if you've never been to the sea before ——"

"Never," said Hope decisively. "But of course you might have seen me this summer at the Inn."

"Oh, are you staying there?" broke in Cecilia impulsively. "Do you know the Shaw boys?"

Hope shook her head. "I don't know anybody except the people at my tables and Mrs. Augustus Walker, who talks to the waitresses about votes for women. I'm a waitress at the Inn, and I pass ices at the dances. I've seen you two at several dances. Oh, and once you came to tea at 'The Sign of the Dolphin'! I work there too, but you didn't see me, because I was making extra sandwiches behind a screen. It was our big day, you see. The sandwiches ran out, and the lemon." She turned to Nancy for sympathy. "We were so hopeful that day!"

"Oh, yes!" agreed Nancy absently. She was watching a scornful flash in Cecilia's eyes answer Alexandra's shocked, indignant glance, and trying desperately to think how she could smooth things over.

"Hope's earning money so she can go to college this fall," she explained rapidly. "Is either of you going?"

"Oh, no!" chorused the cousins icily.

"Lots of the Fair Oaks girls go," volunteered Nancy hastily, "and I think it must be splendid,

but I'm afraid I'm not bright enough. Did you two girls like the Dolphin tea-shop? I'm going there the first day I can get so far."

"Why, it's rather small and stuffy, I thought," began Cecilia.

"The big piazza ——" Nancy broke in.

"It looked very sunny," Cecilia cut her short stiffly.

"Oh, C.!" Alexandra remonstrated. "The sandwiches were very nice." She turned to Hope, who was staring from one to another of the three girls in a puzzled way. "Perhaps we had some of yours—the extra ones you had to make. Anyhow, they were very nice." Alexandra's voice was polite, but likewise very cold and unenthusiastic.

"Oh, thank you for liking them!" cried Hope, ignoring the coldness. "I'm sorry there were other things you didn't like. I'm afraid the Dolphin wasn't at his best that day. It's hard to be always at your best, isn't it? But the Dolphin needn't have chosen our biggest day to act so cranky. He ought to have made an effort and put his best foot forward, as my mother is always advising me to. Oh!" Suddenly the meaning of Cecilia's frank ill-temper and Alexandra's chilly politeness rushed upon Hope. "Oh, I haven't done it to-night! This is my big day—the love-

liest I've had in this lovely place—and I—I didn't stop to think how my—best foot—would look to you. 'Don't be ashamed of poverty, but don't parade it.' That's another of mother's sayings." She turned appealingly to Nancy. "I'm sorry," she said simply. "I might just as well have kept still about what I'm doing here."

"We're going to town to-morrow," announced Cecilia, before Nancy could speak. "There's a shoe sale at Carterson's. I'm going to buy some white buck pumps with black trimmings. I think they're awfully smart."

"I want gold slippers," sighed Alexandra. "But even at the sale mother may think they cost too much. I don't believe she'll let me pay more than six dollars, and they'll probably cost eight."

Hope answered Nancy's comradely smile with an understanding flash of her wonderful eyes, and then listened in aghast silence to the discussion about shoes. Eight dollars—and Alexandra said they tarnished quickly and couldn't be cleaned. It amounted apparently to eight dollars for about three evenings' wear of the shoes. And eight dollars was almost one-twelfth of a hundred, and two hundred would give you a year at college, if you could get a scholarship.

Before the topic of new shoes was exhausted,

Mrs. Lee and the children and Dick and Little Peter came in, the two parties having met at the gate. In a minute Hope said she must go.

"Dick and I will walk down with you," Mrs. Lee told her. "I have an errand to do at the Inn. Yes, Joe, I'm coming!" she answered a cry for help from up-stairs.

"Let's all go to the Inn," suggested Cecilia quickly.

"Oh, C.!" cried thoughtful Alexandra. "You and I would better stay with Nancy. Besides, mother said she wants to know just where we are in the evenings."

"Peter could tell her," muttered Cecilia, sinking ill-humoredly back in her chair.

Peter was chatting gaily with Hope. "We met this afternoon," he explained. "I was out on Baxter's Reef reading, and suddenly I heard some one say, 'Oh, you darling!' Of course I investigated, but the young lady said she was addressing a starfish."

"That's a fine way to scrape acquaintance, isn't it?" commented Cecilia loftily. "Making ridiculous remarks, out loud, to starfish!"

Hope turned to her critic, her great eyes deep with questioning. "Maybe you'd talk to starfish," she said gently, "if you had only about four chances in a summer to hunt for them, and

if it was your first year by the sea, and if Miss Little or some friend wasn't always with you to listen to your raptures."

"No, she wouldn't," cried Peter gaily. "Not if a strange and attractive youth, like me, for example, was also within hearing. Would you, Miss C. Green?"

Before Cecilia could answer, Mrs. Lee came in, and carried off Hope and Dick.

"I like that girl," announced Peter, looking after them. "There's something about her that makes you sit up and take notice."

Nancy could have hugged Peter for that speech. Instead she only smiled at him. "Her eyes are beautiful, aren't they?" she said.

"I can't see why you two are so crazy about her," broke in Cecilia irritably. "Can you, Alexandra?"

"No—not exactly," Alexandra hesitated. "But perhaps we haven't seen enough of her yet to judge."

"If you treated her to any more remarks like the one you made about the starfish episode, Miss C. Green," Peter told his cousin bluntly, "she probably isn't struck all of a heap with your charms. I say, Al, mother sent me to bring you two home. Wants to show off her chickens to an old family friend who's turned up for the evening.

If mother lights on me for delaying, you help me out."

"Very well," Alexandra agreed placidly. "I'm always helping one or the other of you out of something, and getting blamed myself, but I don't specially mind. Good-night, Nancy. I've had a lovely time."

"So have I," echoed Cecilia.

"I certainly haven't," Nancy reflected, when she was left to herself; and turning to a fresh page in the Red Journal she relieved her feelings by writing out: "Things the Twins Must Do."

"First," ran item one on the list, "make 'The Sign of the Dolphin' a perfectly grand success.

"Second," continued the catalogue, "make Hope a perfectly grand success, so that Cecilia and Alexandra will have to acknowledge that she's a splendid girl and wish they'd been nice to her. Third, investigate the tearful bride. Fourth, help me with Clare, and that doll I promised to make. Fifth, talk about Timmy as much as I want to. Sixth, go to see Mrs. Miggs's grandchild and tell me all about her.

"If they divide things up and work hard, maybe they will have a little time off for swimming and tennis and dances, poor twins! How glad I am they're not snobs or boy-crazy or afraid of seeming queer. They'll like Hope and think

it's fine of her to work so hard for an education, and Jane will make those other two see it. Why can't I make people see things? I am as dumb as an ——"

"Hello, Nancy!" It was Johnny Andrews, badly out of breath, and much excited. "No, I can't stop. Dick here? Well, when he comes, you tell him it's so. That's all—just 'it's so.' He'll understand."

"But I don't," teased Nancy. "If you want me to deliver your message correctly, you'd better explain it. A person can't remember things she doesn't understand. I shall probably turn it right around. I've had the same experience in geometry, and I know how it affects me."

"I guess you can remember 'it's so' for ten minutes or thereabouts," retorted Johnny cheerfully. "Did Little Peter go with Dick?"

Nancy explained.

"Well, I shan't stop there to tell him anything," said Johnny loftily. "Little Peter's a quitter. He went off with a book this afternoon, —mooning around on the Reef with a storybook."

"He had a very interesting time out on the Reef," announced Nancy tantalizingly. "I don't believe you were doing anything half so nice."

"Probably not," agreed Johnny, without dis-

playing the faintest bit of curiosity over Nancy's statement. "My message hasn't anything to do with this afternoon. It has to do with this evening. Don't you forget to give it to Dick. Good-bye."

Nancy speculated very hard over the cryptic message. Perhaps Dick would tell her what it meant; but he might be in one of his secretive, lofty moods. Of course it was something about the Green Knight. They had all been watching him in the afternoon, until Peter deserted; and Johnny had evidently been watching him through the evening. Some suspicion that they had had about him Johnny had confirmed. It couldn't be that he had actually proved the Green Knight to be the Parkes' burglar or the disturber of "Gray Gables," because in that case Johnny, who was excitable at any time, would have been far more excited than he was to-night. No, it must be some smaller thing that he had discovered, something that tightened the net of suspicion around the strange boy.

"I just wish they'd stop watching him," sighed Nancy. "He's such a nice-appearing boy. Of course he can't help being a little queer, with such a queer mother, and nobody else in the family. I just wish somebody would watch Dick and Peter and Johnny for a while—find them

sneaking around in the bushes and spying in the dark. They'd better be careful, or some of the real detectives that Mr. Parke hired will be after them."

When Dick finally arrived, he proved to be in quite a mellow mood. "What's so?" He answered his sister's demand for enlightenment. "Why, that your friend Green Cap digs the holes that appear every morning down by Fresh Pond, or some of 'em. Great, deep holes,—oh, four or five feet deep, and more than that square. Johnny was to trail him to-night. We take turns on night work," explained Dick importantly.

"Dick," demanded Nancy solemnly, "what has digging a few holes, or fussing around measuring distances from one tree to another, to do with being a burglar?"

"What has it to do with earning an honest living?" demanded Dick.

"He isn't earning a living any more than you are, Richard Arlington Lee," scoffed Nancy. "He's just having fun."

"Queer fun," sniffed Dick.

"Why don't you ask him about it, instead of spying around?"

"If it's anything crooked, he'd be likely to tell us, wouldn't he?" growled Dick. "Besides, a fellow can't get near enough to ask him anything.

He's as slippery as an eel. If you can catch him, you're welcome to see what you can find out."

"I'll attend to it," said Nancy calmly, and added a final item to the twins' formidable list. "Stop this nonsensical business about the Green Knight's being a burglar. If anybody can catch an eel and make him talk the Terrible Twins can."

CHAPTER X

TWINS TO THE RESCUE

"If we go off exploring this morning and leave you here alone, N. Lee, in your wonderful old Lookout, you've got to promise us one thing." Jane Learned, perched comfortably on the Birdcage railing, fixed her hostess with a bland, determined stare.

"What?" demanded Nancy absently, patting into shape the green cushion whose cover she had just finished sewing up. The green covering and the down pillows for the Birdcage had come on the same train with the Learned twins, and while three tongues flew, exchanging news, exclaiming, laughing, and sighing over the things the summer had brought to the Fair Oaks circle, Nancy and Christina had kept their fingers busy too.

"I can't sew and talk," Jane had excused herself.

"You can't sew at all," Nancy had corrected her. "I don't want my Birdcage cushions to look like the hats you make, Jane dearie; so talk ahead and don't feel at all guilty about not helping with the cushions."

How they had chattered! Nancy had the most to tell, because, in addition to her own adventures, all the girls, hearing of her accident, had written her long, newsy letters. Margaret Lewis was busy tutoring a brother who hadn't passed his grade in the public school. Margaret was worried about going back to Fair Oaks; her father and the little boys needed her dreadfully, she could see that more clearly every day.

"But so do we need her!" sighed little Christina. "She's so steadying."

Lloyd was in despair over Jeanne's horsemanship. "She falls off for no reason at all," wrote Lloyd, "and my pony Ginger won't stay behind any other horse, so my neck is lame most of the time from turning around to see whether she's on or off. But Jeanne is happy here in this 'queer big land of America,' and poor mother loves to have her with us, because she laughs at everything and sings around the house. I'm trying to see more to laugh at in life, to amuse mother."

Kittie Westervelt was in the seventh heaven of bliss, because a boy named Cyril Baynes, who had an automobile, took her riding almost every day; and Plain Mary Smith declared that Doctor Jim and Mrs. Doctor Jim were perfectly splendid, that she was growing almost slim, gardening and berrying and hill-climbing on Doctor Jim's Berkshire

farm, and that her pink chiffon dress, the princess's "wedding present" to her, was a dream. "I don't want to grow vain," wrote Plain Mary apologetically, "but when you've never had any becoming clothes and never thought you could have any, a pink chiffon dress like mine is —— Oh, you know, Nancy, what I'm trying to say."

"She means," Jane interpreted sagely, "that it's an epoch-making experience—an adventure in the pure joy of living. Well, none of 'em can beat you in the matter of adventures, N. Lee. You always did attract excitement, enviable mortal!" And then Jane proceeded to try to extract the promise from Nancy concerning what she should and should not do while her two guests were off on a morning stroll.

"It's just exactly this," she explained, in answer to Nancy's question. "You're not to be on the lookout any more at present. You're not to try to find any more unfortunates. Your private collection of Waifs and Strays is already as big as we can handle. We're quite willing, of course, to be Perfect Guests, and busy Wonder-Workers, and to live up to all the vows of the Triangle about coming to the rescue of one another. But already we've got mysteries to solve, strange ladies to find and champion, a business to boom, a child to divert —that's fully two weeks' work, you know, N. Lee."

"All right," laughed Nancy. "I hereby solemnly promise not to be on the lookout while you're gone. I'll turn my back to the rocks and mend stockings like anything. Because," she confessed, "there does seem to be a sort of black magic about this Birdcage. Almost everything I've discovered has been from here."

"Then hadn't you better go back to the piazza?" suggested earnest little Christina, who took the matter of arranging Nancy's tangled Lookout cases very seriously indeed.

But Nancy refused to move; the new green cushions were so pretty, more white irises were coming out in her private garden, and there was a breeze down in the Birdcage that didn't reach the piazza at all. So, leaving her in her favorite retreat, Christina and Jane, armed with a map of the Point that showed the Bride's cottage, the Green Knight's home, "Gray Gables," and "The Sign of the Dolphin," sauntered out down Lighthouse Road, quarreling amiably about the best route for them to pursue. Before they had decided anything, they met a little girl who had been selling sweet-peas among the cottagers. She had just one bunch left, of the loveliest rose-pink blossoms.

"I think it would be a tactful attention to send them back to Nancy," suggested Jane.

"Oh, yes," agreed Christina, and they paid for

the flowers and told the child just how to get to the Birdcage.

Only a few steps further on, they met a barefoot, solemn-faced boy, carrying pond-lilies. He, too, had sold most of his flowers, and he offered the twins what were left for a dime. Christina could not resist pond-lilies and the boy, in turn, was directed to the Birdcage.

"We're certainly being the Perfect Guests so far," said Jane. "Please let's cross the Point first, Christina. We can't hope to find a housekeeping-bride dawdling around on the rocks, where we can scrape acquaintance with her, in the morning, and it's no time to investigate a tea-shop either. This is just a preliminary exploring-trip, and I want to see the real, broad ocean."

Meanwhile Nancy sat in the Birdcage talking to the sweet-pea girl and the pond-lily boy, who smiled sheepishly at her and dug their toes restlessly into the knot-holes in the Birdcage floor. But though they were ill at ease, they seemed to enjoy their call.

"It's pretty here, ain't it?" said the little girl. "He and I live next door to each other down on the Neck."

"Wa'n't many lilies to-day," volunteered the boy. "You summer-folks are all crazy about lilies."

"What do you do in winter, when we've gone?" asked Nancy.

"Work in the cannery," from the girl.

"After you're fourteen, or can make the inspector think you are," added the boy.

"It's awful lonesome here winters," put in the girl. "All the fathers are off on the Banks fishing, and you never know how they're doing, or when they'll get back."

"Yes, all our fun comes in summer," the boy contributed. "The Fourth of July is great for us, but Thanksgiving and Christmas—they're frosts. I won't be a fisherman when I grow up."

"You can't be anything else," said the girl, "'cept a canner, and that's worse. It's a woman's job, mostly, like cooking."

"Don't you have the library and the reading-room to go to after work?" asked Nancy.

"Naw!" the boy was scornful. "That's all for the summer people. There's a libr'y in the town, but the trolley doesn't run after September, and it's pretty far to walk—four miles. I wisht I lived in the town."

"I don't," said the girl. "I'd rather live on the Neck, where you c'n have flower-gardens, and peddle flowers to the summer-folks. Only I do wish we could save up some of our Fourth of July

till Christmas. I guess I must be going now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," echoed the boy, sidling along after his little neighbor.

"Oh, tell me your names!" Nancy called hastily after them. "Do you know Mrs. Miggs?" she asked, when introductions had been effected.

"Sure we do," said the boy heartily.

"She's an awful nice lady," testified the girl. "Her daughter lives on the Neck near us, and her granddaughter that's sick."

When they had gone, Nancy chuckled with delight. The twins had done it! The black magic of the Birdcage lookout had infected them—made them play right into its hands. For here were two more to be helped.

"But it's quite easy to see how," mused Nancy. "We can leave a Thanksgiving and a Christmas for them with Mrs. Miggs. Or we can send it—one that will be nice for her grandchild too. Goodness! How busy being on the lookout does keep you!"

Nancy lay back among her green cushions, thinking. There were ever so many little flower-girls, and girls who came for washings, and paper-boys, and pond-lily boys wandering about the Point. They were all thin, wistful-eyed, eager little creatures. Probably most of them lived

on the Neck, with its straggling lanes of ugly, weather-worn, decrepit little houses, and worked hard through the long, lonesome winters while their fathers were at sea. It really ought to be a big Christmas, enough for all of those children. Nancy wondered that the summer colony had never thought to do anything for them. There was a big fair at the Inn every year, at which the cottage people all helped, but Nancy couldn't remember what it was for—certainly not, however, for a children's Christmas.

"Morning, Miss Lee." Doctor "Sammy" Jennings was peering amusedly down at his absent-minded young patient. "How's the ankle? Suppose you walk across this summer-house floor and see how it goes."

It went beautifully!

"That's the advantage of good care and complete rest," said Doctor Jennings complacently. "Now can I trust you to be very careful——"

"I'm afraid not," laughed Nancy. "I'm generally careless every chance I get."

"Mustn't be," continued the doctor. "Walk a little bit to-day, and a little bit more to-morrow. Yes, go driving, if you like. Tennis? Oh, you'll come to that after a while—not for some time, of course. Better get a rubber bandage. Now don't take any risks, climbing on slippery rocks. Go

slow. You don't need me any more. I'll come and take you driving some day soon. Just now I'm frightfully busy."

Nancy suppressed an overwhelming desire to dance, to vault over the Birdcage railing, to walk sedately down the path and out to find and astonish the twins. Fortunately, just as she had decided that it really couldn't matter how far you walked, if only you were careful at every step how you come down on that weak ankle, a Roman-striped umbrella caught her eye, bobbing along the path to the public rocks.

"Oh, you're there!" called the pretty bride, catching sight, at the same moment, of Nancy. "May I come up? I think I'll go round this time; it's a very hot day, out here in the sun.

"I didn't tell you my name before. It's Marion Dale—Mrs. Roger Dale." The pretty bride, reappearing after a minute in the summer-house, appeared to be in a very brisk and businesslike mood this morning. "And your name is Lee, isn't it? I saw it on your mail box. My husband's gone to town again, and this time I feel that I simply must accomplish something. So I've come to you—I don't know any one else out here. You say you can cook, but do you know about dampers? And is what you know anything that you can tell me? I never in all my

life heard dampers mentioned," sighed Mrs. Dale forlornly. "There's not a word about them in any of my ten cook-books. But apparently there's nothing so important in this world, or so baffling."

Nancy nodded sympathetically. "Yes, the fire is certainly the worst thing about cooking. Don't you know when yours is open or shut?"

The bride shook her head. "I only know that it's always too hot or too cold, or else it's out altogether. Shuffling around those little openings, and pulling handles up and down, doesn't seem to make any difference, or if it does it's the wrong difference."

Nancy considered, frowning. "If I could take hold of that stove! It's so hard to tell you! And even after you understand the way it works, you have to sort of experiment, because each stove has its own little crooks. The one at Miss Marshall's bungalow was quite different from the practice ones in the Fair Oaks Domestic Science kitchen. My ankle is better now—but—I—we—couldn't go out this afternoon to see about it, because we have another engagement."

Mrs. Dale looked at her adviser sadly. "It's not that I mind working hard, you understand," she said almost fiercely. "I rather like things to be hard. It gives you such a fine feeling when

you've mastered them. But this—I simply can't do it! I burn the toast, the steak is raw inside and scorched outside, and the coffee is muddy. My puddings are a sticky mess, and my pies are terrible. I don't a bit blame my husband for feeling cross! He's gone off to town to-day 'on business.' I'm perfectly sure that he's really gone to get a square meal." She leaned forward and faced Nancy squarely. "I suppose the thing to do is to give up and hire a cook."

"Why do you call it giving up?" demanded Nancy.

"Why?" repeated the bride. "Why? It will show that I'm a failure, won't it? Our beautiful plan will be spoiled. Or anyway I shall be left out of it." Mrs. Dale paused, and added hastily, "Never mind about that part of it now. Just imagine how I looked forward to doing everything for my husband. I never dreamed I couldn't manage. Oh, quick, tell me once more about the top row of holes in my stove, and the bottom row. I've just time to get back before the grocer's wagon is due, and they won't leave the things, I'm afraid, if I'm not there. Yes, yes, I think I see. Pipe damper? I haven't found any. Yes! Yes! Oh, thank you. I'll find them all and do as you've said, and perhaps I can manage that fire. Ten cook-books, but not a word about dampers!"

Off went the Roman parasol, leaving Nancy a little more enlightened about the case of the tearful bride, and much more interested and more anxious than before to help her out of her domestic difficulties.

She was eager, of course, to tell the twins all that she had learned, but the twins showed no intention of coming back. What were they doing, Nancy wondered, out so long in the hot sun? She would have wondered still more if she could have seen them just then, pacing methodically up and down a particularly hot and sunny stretch of Surf Road, one on one edge, one on the other, following an alert little lady who fluttered about so fast that she seemed to be on both sides of the road at once. And over the restless little lady's trim black hat dangled a long green veil. Jane had nudged Christina at sight of it, and Christina had nudged back understandingly. But that was when they had first caught sight of the little lady, who was then running distractedly down Surf Road toward the spot where the twins sat resting and looking off at the sea. And as she ran, her fluttering hands were busily pulling and twisting at the fastenings of the green veil, which was drawn down tight over her face.

"Oh, would you help me get off this bothering thing?" she had called, the minute she saw the

twins. "I've lost something very valuable, and I can't see to find it. Oh, never mind if you tear the veil. I don't care a pin for it."

"Was it your horse that galloped past us just now?" Jane had asked, while Christina worked at the knots.

"I suppose so," admitted the green-veiled lady. "She tipped me over, and before I could think what to do she was up and off. I oughtn't to have tried to drive her by myself,—I have horrible luck driving horses,—but I was in a hurry and Jules, my gardener, was spraying roses and couldn't very well stop, and Lawrence—that's my boy—was off for the morning, before I remembered that I must go to town. Lady's all right. She'll stop in a minute and go to eating grass. I'll send Jules after her. But what worries me is my bundle. I *can't* lose that!"

"We'll help you hunt, if you'll tell us where to look and what to look for," volunteered Christina.

"Oh, thank you, my dear!" cried the lady. "It's a brown paper parcel, about a foot and a half square and perhaps three inches thick, and it fell out somewhere between the place back there in the road where the gravel is all pawed up—that's where Lady started plunging—and the place down there where the bushes are bent. There's where she spilled me out. Everything else went

out too, somewhere between those two places. I've found the whip and the dust-robe and the hitching-rein and a letter that my boy Lawrence forgot to mail for me yesterday, but I can't find my bundle."

"It must have dropped down in the bushes," Jane decided easily. "We'll each take one side of the road. Don't you want to do something about your horse before she gets any further away?"

"Oh, no," said the lady impatiently. "Lawrence and Jules can attend to her later. I must find this bundle! Nothing else matters."

There was something fascinating about the little lady; she was so anxious about her lost bundle, so nonchalant about her runaway horse, so absurdly unsystematic in her bobbing, peering progress along the road. Besides, she was the lady of mystery, come out of her shrouding green veil. She was the queer mother of Nancy's queer Green Knight.

"Twins' luck!" muttered Jane to Christina.

The sun beat down pitilessly, and Surf Road, at the point Lady had chosen for her manœuvers, was stony and ankle-deep in sand.

"Do you s'pose she ever had a bundle?" murmured Christina to Jane. "She's so queer, you know, Nancy said."

But in another minute the bundle came to light, Christina, in despair, having gone all the way down the bank and found it impossibly far off under a blackberry bush.

The green-veiled lady hugged Christina impulsively, and then hugged her bundle. "I should never have found it myself!" she said. "Let's sit down and rest."

"Is it all there?" asked Jane, craftily intent on getting as much information as possible in return for her exhausting search after the strange lady's mysterious bundle. "The wrapping paper is a good deal torn at the corner."

The lady examined the tear critically, thus exposing to Jane's curious gaze the fact that the whole bundle was nothing but a sheaf of loose papers.

Before Jane thought, she sniffed angrily, "Papers! I thought it was money you'd lost or jewelry."

The green-veiled lady hugged her precious bundle tighter and laughed heartily at Jane's scorn. "Both those things are here, maybe," she cried, "though you can't see them, and something besides, that's any amount more precious." Her eager little face grew sober. "I wish I could tell you all about it, my dears, to pay you for your long, hot hunt. But I mustn't. My boy Law-

rence will be highly indignant with me as it is. He'll say I haven't played fair. I didn't think about that before, because I was so anxious to get my precious bundle, first, into the post, and then back into my possession. Now I must go and rewrap it, and send poor, overworked Jules after that miserable horse—unless I can find Lawrence. And above all, I mustn't sit here chatting with you two. But I do wonder—is either of you the girl who sprained her ankle out on the rocks?"

"No, but we're visiting her," chorused the twins.

"Really? How odd!" laughed the lady. "All the more reason, Lawrence would say, for me to pin down this hot, ridiculous, maddening old veil and proceed home to business. Please, please don't think me rude and horrid and ungrateful. I suppose you can't help thinking me perfectly ridiculous!" And with a shrouded but very friendly smile, and a wave of the hand that somehow made the tired, hot, puzzled twins feel pleasant again in spite of themselves, the green-veiled lady tripped away up Surf Road.

"So she isn't disfigured, and she isn't particularly young and lovely," Jane summarized their discoveries to Nancy later. "And the boy's name is Lawrence and the gardener's name is Jules, and I don't believe she's hiding from any importu-

nate lover. She's comical and friendly and the kind of person you can't help liking. I wish I could have made her explain what she meant about those papers, and her not 'playing fair' and the indignation of Lawrence. Now let's swap with the boys for all they know—make a bargain that they're to tell us everything, and among us all something ought to develop. Exonerating the Green Knight and family from the unjust suspicions of their neighbors is the part of Nancy's job that I like best."

"Aren't you going to help with all the other things, Jane?" asked Christina anxiously.

Jane shrugged. "There'll be some easy way of settling those, I imagine," she said. "That is, if you and Nancy don't go to worrying and getting solemncholy over them. You must remember that this lookout business is a game. Mrs. Miggs started Nancy on it to cheer her up, not to wear her out. Everybody has to get used to seeing lots of things that he can't help go wrong in this world, so we might as well begin now. Anyhow," concluded Jane calmly, "as long as you can make a game of helping people, with all the hop, skip, and go of a game in it, that's as long as you'll really help 'em to amount to anything. Think over your long and melancholy pasts and you'll see that I'm right."

CHAPTER XI

PUTTING A KINK IN THE DOLPHIN'S TAIL

Of course, now that she was allowed to drive out, Nancy transferred the tea-party she had planned for the twins' first afternoon from the Birdcage to the Dolphin tea-house, which she couldn't wait a day longer than necessary to see. The transfer was easy; she had only to telephone Louise Minot at the Inn, and Alexandra and Cecilia, and send for one of the public carriages to take her down to the new meeting-place. For unluckily nobody but Nancy herself had any faith in her argument that she could walk a long way if she were only careful enough.

The tea-party had no connection with tea, which none of the girls ever drank if she could help it. Instead, there were sandwiches, cinnamon toast, lemonade, ices, little cakes, and candies, served, of course, on a tiffin table on the piazza, with Hope Haskins, her eyes dancing at sight of Nancy, to "work" the trays.

"Can't you come and eat with us after you've brought our things in?" asked Nancy, catching

Hope in a corner. The rest of the party were scattered about the rooms, looking at the pretty things that were for sale or admiring Miss Willis's old brasses.

"Oh, no!" said Hope, in consternation. "How unbusinesslike it would look! And if Miss Willis didn't mind, how cross Miss Little and Miss Green would feel. Miss Minot, too, maybe. She looked funny when she saw you introducing me to your two guests. Oh, Nancy, I'm glad you came to-day, because it's my last week here. Fixed expenses must go down. And I'm glad you came early, because I have errands to do later out on the Point. More new dresses to carry to the little sickly girl at 'Gray Gables.' Miss Willis does the loveliest embroidery on them."

"Oh, Nancy, come look at these ducky gingerbread men," called Louise Minot. "Will you take some back for me to Bill and Joe?"

Nancy looked at the dolls. "Yes, of course, only I want that one with wings for a sick child —Clare Smith at 'Gray Gables.' Hope's going out there; she can take it."

"There!" exulted Jane in Nancy's ear. "One thing on that list easily disposed of. Why not dump the dampers on Hope too? Send the bride a gingerbread doll—or no, some of those sweet little bridey-looking cakes with swirly frosting, for

her dessert to-night, and a note to say you've secured her a damper expert, on the afternoon indicated in her order."

"Maybe Hope isn't one."

"Sure she is! A girl with the owl for her sacred bird, living out in the country, where everybody is a wonderful cook—she's never let dampers get by her. There's another thing off our hands!"

Nancy caught Hope again, as she flew by with the first trayful for the party, and Hope was as good as Jane's word for her. "Of course I can show the lady if she'll let me. That's one thing I certainly do know about—stoves. You can safely say that in your note. And Miss Willis will be glad to have me go there as long as it means a sale of our cakes."

"Hope, will you have to wait a year longer for college?" demanded Nancy hastily.

Hope nodded. "I'm afraid so. But anyhow, I've had all the fun of thinking I was going this fall. Please don't keep me any longer. It doesn't look well, Nancy Lee. Besides, it's time for your party to sit down."

So Nancy gathered her forces around the loaded table, and amid much laughter and chattering the party proceeded. Louise and Alexandra liked both the twins, and Cecilia liked Christina but was determined not to find anything fascinating

about Jane, just because Nancy had spoken of her in such glowing terms. Besides, Cecilia was cross this afternoon. Her cousin Peter had pushed her off the float when they were all in swimming that morning, in an unsolicited effort to "make her more at home in the water," and her aunt had objected to her going to the Inn for dinner with a family who were strangers to the Littles. Cecilia felt abused. It annoyed her to watch Hope, with that shining, sparkling look in her eyes, hurrying back and forth, or hovering adoringly behind Nancy's chair. Cecilia's and Alexandra's opinion of her she seemed to ignore entirely, enjoying life just as thoroughly as ever. After everything had been served, Hope brought a paper and pencil to Nancy, whispered something in her ear, and said "Thank you!" with a little ecstatic thrill in her voice, when Nancy, having scribbled something on the paper, handed it back. Cecilia could stand it no longer.

"You seem to have a great many secrets with our waitress," she said irritably.

"Secrets?" Nancy looked at her blankly. "Oh, it's no secret. Hope is going to do an errand for me. You know the pretty bride I told you about, out by the lighthouse—Mrs. Roger Dale is her name. Well, she's been to see me again, and one of her troubles is that she doesn't know anything

about stove-dampers. Hope's going to show her, when she stops there with some little cakes."

Cecilia laughed disagreeably. "If that's her trouble, it's fortunate I didn't go to see her. I never touched a cooking-stove."

"Great Hat! What a helpless, hapless bride you'll make!" drawled Jane, at which everybody laughed but Cecilia, and Nancy hastened to change the subject.

But the only thing she could think of to say was, "Hope's going to lose her place here, because there's not enough patronage to keep an extra girl busy. That means she won't have money enough to start her college course in September."

"Oh, what a shame!" cried impulsive little Christina.

"I'm sorry, I'm sure," said Cecilia stiffly, "though she certainly doesn't look as if she wanted any one's pity. She looks just—sickeningly happy."

"Oh, C.!" protested Alexandra.

"I can't help—I mean it," Cecilia insisted. "It always makes me cross to see anybody just throwing it in your face that they're so perfectly contented with life—specially when they haven't any reason to be."

"I should imagine," put in quiet Louise Minot, "from what Nancy has just told us that she's do-

ing what the boys call 'keeping a stiff upper lip.' I'd be doing that most of the time, I think, in her place. She works in the Inn dining-room, you know, and she looks about as big as a minute carrying a heavy trayful of dishes. I never spoke to her, but I've noticed that bright, excited sort of expression that she always wears. She never looks tired or cross."

"So you're one of her admirers, too, Louise," scoffed Cecilia. She turned to her cousin. "We seem to be in the minority."

"Why, of course I admire her, Cecilia," Alexandra began placidly, "for being plucky and wanting to make the most of herself. Only ——" Alexandra paused meaningly.

"I say, Nancy, I've had an idea." Jane had been very quiet for her, all the afternoon, her thoughts far away on the mysterious green-veiled lady. But she had felt Hope's charm, and now she shared Nancy's irritation at Cecilia. "Hope belongs in the W. W.'s," Jane went on, after an impressive pause. "Hadn't you thought of it? We must initiate her at the very earliest opportunity."

"Oh, yes!" Nancy took up the idea eagerly. "She would be a splendid member, wouldn't she? The W. W.'s"—Nancy turned politely to the three outsiders—"is a secret society at Fair Oaks ——"

"Started at Fair Oaks School," interposed Jane, "but it takes in —— Well, the nearest that I can tell you and keep the secrecy pledge, is to say that distinguished persons wherever found are admitted."

"Aren't any of the rest of us eligible?" asked Louise.

Jane shrugged. "I can't see that you are, can you, Christina darling? But the boys are working that way. We may be able to initiate them before the summer is over—that is, if they accomplish what we think they will, instead of what they want to."

"Oh, have they told you what they do off by themselves all the time?" demanded Alexandra. "Peter is a regular clam about it."

Jane smilingly pressed her advantage. "They told us because we helped them. Nancy helped them a lot at first, and Christina and I a little this morning. You'd better get into the game." Jane squinted at the Dolphin sign which swung from a piazza pillar and changed the subject with enlivening abruptness. "That Dolphin would be a lot nicer with more kink in his tail."

"Why don't you go and tell the lady at the desk so?" asked Cecilia, thinking she saw a chance to disconcert this maddeningly superior girl, who had found out the boys' carefully guarded secret

"THANKS, I WAS JUST GOING"

in a day, while Cecilia had been working vainly for weeks to make them confide in her. "She owns this place, and evidently she's not making a success of it, in spite of your wonderful Hope's help. Her name is Miss Willis."

Jane arose smilingly. "Thanks, I was just going," she announced, and marched blandly down the piazza and in at the door. Nancy and Christina stared, open-eyed, after her, Christina alarmed, Nancy triumphant, but both curious and longing to follow. Only that might spoil Jane's plan, whatever it was; if she wanted help, she would tell them.

So they sat still and joined animatedly in the talk about a yacht-race for which a Mr. Ellis, a guest at the Inn, had offered prizes. Mr. Ellis had no boat himself—didn't even care for sailing. He was just a public-spirited gentleman who enjoyed Halcyon and wanted to help keep things lively. He didn't dance, but he subscribed generously to the Saturday dances, and he had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Fourth of July celebration. The race was to be on a Saturday afternoon, with a picnic supper at the boat-house and a moonlight "float" in the evening—all Mr. Ellis's idea.

"He's a funny little man," Louise explained to the others, who had never heard of the wonderful

Mr. Ellis. "He's young and rather good-looking, only he's too white and soft and do-nothing for my taste. He never does do anything, except read and smoke and walk a little, arrayed in beautiful white flannels. He is pleasant to everybody and seems to want to be popular, or he wouldn't bother with things like this race; but he is perfectly content with his own society. He 'flocks by himself,' as the boys say, except occasionally for politeness' sake."

Cecilia sighed. "I wish I had a boat to sail—or knew how to sail, so I could ship as somebody's helper. Peter's going to help Dick, and Cornelia is going out with her brother. Suppose we girls have some kind of athletic contest. Nancy, you said we could have a tennis tournament. Why don't we?"

Nancy laughed. "I was waiting till I could play, I suppose, but that won't be yet a while. We'll have one day after to-morrow. Does that suit everybody? And Louise, can you invite three or four extra girls from the Inn to play? Dick says that we ought to have at least eight for a tournament. He knows how to draw the names out and arrange for partners."

Louise would get the extra players, and the day suited every one.

"Mother said that if we had a tournament she

wanted to offer prizes," contributed Alexandra. "As we haven't a court or a boat, we're getting all our good times through our friends, and she wants to do something in return."

"If Aunt May gets prizes, they'll be worth having," declared Cecilia. "Don't ask girls who play too well, Louise, because I want a chance at those prizes."

"It's a shame you can't play, Nancy," said little Christina. "Why not wait till next week?"

But Nancy said no; they could do something else next week, and it was better to have the tennis match when everybody was enthusiastic for it.

Just then Jane stuck her head out the door. "Christina darling," she drawled, "come and buy a duck of a candle-shade that I've discovered in here."

"I don't believe I can afford ——" began Christina doubtfully.

"Hurry, please," ordered Jane, with a comical gesture in the direction of the tea-party, and the small twin meekly rose to the occasion.

"Isn't Jane Learned odd and amusing?" said Louise, when Christina had gone. "Do you suppose she really said that to Miss Willis about the Dolphin's tail?"

"I don't know," laughed Nancy, "and it's no

use asking until she's ready to tell us. Whatever it is, it's sure to be something comical."

It was fully ten minutes before the twins reappeared, Christina carrying the candle-shade done up in a neat bundle.

"Well, did you tell her?" asked Cecilia indifferently.

"Sure I told her," returned Jane, "and we agreed perfectly. Beginning about to-morrow there'll *be* a kink in his tail." Jane lopped down in a big wicker-chair and gave a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Did you notice her?" she asked the party. "Miss Willis, I mean. Great Hat, but she can draw! Too bad she's the kind of artist that hasn't any artistic sense left over for clothes, and that has to be reminded what an improvement it will be to put a curl in her Dolphin's tail. In other words," said Jane, "she's a frump, and she hasn't a sense of humor, but when you put it up to her, she certainly can draw! Wait till you see!"

"What did you do, Jane?" asked Nancy. "You really ought to tell us, you know, after we've waited around for you so long."

Jane only shrugged again. "You'd have stayed anyhow. Unfortunately there's no rush for tables, to suggest the necessity of breaking up this perfectly good party. Besides, I have told you. I sug-

gested the advantage of putting a kink in the Dolphin's tail, and Miss Willis agreed, and it's to be done. If you want to see it, when done," concluded Jane coldly, "I suppose you'll have to come around this way to-morrow, or the day after, or both." Thereafter Jane resolutely refused to say anything more, and Cecilia suggested that they really ought to play a little tennis before dinner. Louise could use Nancy's shoes and racquet, and they could take turns staying out, changing every two or three games.

"There's Mr. Ellis now," said Louise, as they stood by the roadside, having helped Nancy into her carriage.

"He is good-looking!"

"Any man is, in good-looking flannels."

"I don't like his face; his mouth looks mean, somehow."

"Why!" Nancy broke into the chorus of comment, "I think he's the one who came in to see about Regent's barking, the night of the Parkes' burglary and the 'Gray Gables' ghost. Oh, he certainly is the one! At first Dick tried to make me think I'd seen the burglar, but he rather changed his mind later. Now he'll be thoroughly convinced."

"Did Mr. Parke's detectives ever find out anything about that burglary?" asked Alexandra.

"No," Louise reported, "they said there was nothing to work on, and it's all been dropped."

"Good-bye! I'll have the things ready for you, Louise." Nancy signaled her driver to start. She was secretly anxious for the tennis practice to be over. Then she and Christina could get Jane to themselves, and perhaps Jane would tell them what she had really said to Miss Willis.

But before the chance for confidences arrived the twins had been beaten by Cecilia and Louise, then by Cecilia and Alexandra, and Cecilia had beaten both twins in singles—three-game sets to be sure, but it did suggest, as Christina said sadly, that Fair Oaks was badly outclassed.

"And Jane boasted awfully about my playing, on the way back here from the Dolphin," sighed the small twin mournfully.

"Well, after I'd made one grand-stand play—as I hope," said Jane, "I thought you'd hold up our athletic record. But I never saw you play worse."

"Maybe it's the strange court," suggested Nancy hopefully. "Dick will give you both some good hard practice to-morrow. Now, Jane!"

Jane laughed. "Oh, it's nothing much to boast about," she said shamefacedly. "That Cecilia person made me feel mad right straight through, and of course I felt sorry for Hope. And when I thought how I'd fussed and planned and toiled

over silly old scrapes at one old school after another, and how I'd hate to work a whole extra winter up among the Vermont snow-drifts, waiting for an education to come my way, and how that Cecilia person never has to wait for what she wants, and how we terrible twins are getting old enough to take hold of something useful—with all that mixed up in my head," summarized Jane, "why, of course I got up and walked off, when the Cecilia person gave me the cue, just bound to do something sensible and helpful for a change. But I hadn't an idea what I'd do or say when I got in there. I hadn't even had a thought when I went back to get Christina. But while she was buying something, I had a chance to talk carelessly and think hard. Then I tucked her off in a corner out of hearing, and just let the sight of her back hair inspire me to live up to the reputation of the terrible twins. And now," Jane's manner was suddenly tragic, "we can't practice tennis tomorrow morning, girls, unless we get up before breakfast. Because I've solemnly promised that we'll all three come and work a jig-saw, or a hammer and nails, or a paint-brush according to circumstances, the whole morning long, over in the Dolphin tea-shop. It's a big job for one morning anyhow, and we can't possibly take any time off. Miss Willis's nephew is coming for us

at nine o'clock. He doesn't know it yet, but he is."

"Jane, what on earth do you mean?" demanded Nancy.

"Oh, Jane, what mess have you got us into now?" wailed little Christina.

"Oh, only helping to make Dolphin garden-sticks," announced Jane, "and fairy and mermaid and parrot and bird-in-general garden-sticks. Remember the fairy on a garden-stick that mother paid three round dollars for in New York, Christina darling? Well, this Miss Willis can draw one that has it beaten cold." She turned to Nancy. "Green stick a yard or so long, topped by quaint and amusing painted wooden figure: that's the latest thing in garden decoration, to tie up your loppy plants to."

"And is that the curl in the Dolphin's tail?" demanded Nancy.

"Why, it's just one more thing to sell," remonstrated Christina. "The candle-shades are lovely, but they didn't help much. How are people to know about it, Jane? You said to-morrow ——"

"Oh, the ones to sell are just a sort of side-issue." Jane dismissed objections brusquely. "The main point is a row of curly-tailed dolphins—two rows of 'em—marching up each side of the front walk, behind the little box trees, and more rows

bristling along the piazza railings. Do you think people can resist that? Won't they be crazy to walk up between those rows of prancing dolphins? —prancing on green sticks. And then of course they'll go in. And gardening is such a fad at present. Seems as if anybody would want either a dolphin or a mermaid for a sea-garden, or else a fairy or a bird for an inland garden, to tie their roses to, and their larkspur and their foxgloves and their—I don't know many plant names," said Jane, "but I'd want some sticks. I made mother promise me her three dollar garden-fairy to have in our room this winter. The Dolphin brand is guaranteed waterproof and lasting," added Jane inconsequently, "but to-morrow we'll have to put a temporary coat of water-colors on the front-walk brigade, because oils won't dry quickly enough."

"Jane, you make me dizzy, you go so fast," declared Nancy.

"Your own fault," Jane accused her, "for introducing me to this lookout game and to star-eyed Hope—isn't that a poetical phrase?—and the annoying Cecilia. To continue with the arrangements: Miss Willis's nephew—the same one who has a jig-saw to lend—drives a carriage to take people around from the trolley terminus. To-morrow he's going to stick a sign on his bus: 'To

Dolphin Tea-House, five cents.' He doesn't know it yet, but he is. If he gets a lot of extra business, the other drivers will offer to do likewise."

"It will all be splendid if it works," sighed Nancy. "And of course it means that Hope stays."

"Hope stays," repeated Jane, "until it's plain to be seen whether or not the drooping Dolphin can be propped up by flower-sticks and reinvigorated by curling his tail."

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT TO THE CAPTAINS' WATCH-TOWER

THE boys were growing tired of their detective-work. You couldn't get anywhere with a subject whose habits, though strange, were as monotonously regular as the Green Knight's. He seemed fascinated by the swamp around Fresh Pond. The paper that apparently guided his operations there was tattered on the edges and split from much folding and unfolding, though nobody could have handled a bit of rare old lace any more carefully than the Knight did that precious document. Morning after morning he spread it out on the same flat stone, and returned to it to stare and whistle between his mysterious experiments with rope and yard-stick. As the days passed he experimented less and stared more, sitting for hours hunched up on a small stone beside the mystic paper, and always he whistled and whistled.

Afternoons he behaved more like a normal human being. Alone on Lady's back, or with his mother in the cart beside him, he rode or drove

along the winding Point roads, off toward Halcyon Harbor, a resort four miles away up the coast, and just before dinner-time into the town for the city papers. Somebody in that queer household could not get on without the day's news.

The Green Knight was a good horseman. Lady curveted and pranced and shied, but she never got away from the boy's control. On days when there was no wind for sailing, the three amateur detectives envied the Knight his horse, and wished he was more sociable. Then they could swap sails for horseback rides, or all crowd into the cart and drive to town in pursuit of adventure, when time hung heavy.

What the Green Knight did at night—especially late at night—was, as the three detectives well realized, the crux of their puzzle. Unfortunately their families had views about boys being at home in bed during the hours most favored by both ghosts and burglars. The three could generally escape after dinner and hurry back to the road that skirted Fresh Pond, near which, about one evening in three, the Green Knight could be found digging his great square pits, or else filling in those that he had dug a few nights before. Why he never dug except at night, though he left the holes as clear evidence against himself, if anybody had wanted it, was a matter that the detectives dis-

cussed endlessly. He worked by the faint twinkle of the little electric "bug-light" that he had offered to Nancy, so that from the road he was hardly more noticeable than a glowworm. But even with the drawback of darkness, the Green Knight was an expert at excavating. He dug, dug, dug, whistled and whistled. The earth piled up in great spadefuls beside the hole he made, and he never seemed to have any doubt about the exact location he wanted for this, nor any trouble in keeping it square. These things puzzled the detectives, until Little Peter, walking boldly down one evening to question the Knight, as Nancy had suggested, kicked his feet against a row of short stakes that bounded the square. That was all the information that Little Peter got for his trouble.

"What am I digging for?" repeated the Knight in answer to Little Peter's query. "Why, fish-worms. One name for 'em is night-crawlers, so I thought maybe they'd crawl up in the dark and be easier to get."

"Where's your can?" asked Little Peter suspiciously.

"My what?"

"Your can—don't you keep them in a tin can?" explained Little Peter.

"No," said the other. "I keep 'em in a paper."

"Where's your paper?"

"In my pocket."

"I call that messy."

"Oh, no!" said the Green Knight blandly. "Not at all messy, because I've got no worms yet."

"What do you use fish-worms for around here?" demanded Little Peter, in a final attempt to trap the excavator.

"Well," said the Knight placidly, "if I got any, I thought I'd go fishing—river-fishing, I mean. Of course I know you can't use worms for deep-sea fishing. But as I haven't got any, I shan't go."

"How many hours have you put in trying to get one worm?" sniffed Peter.

The Green Knight stuck his face out into the light of his tiny lantern and grinned wickedly. "I'm awfully persistent," he explained. "Besides, I've got lots of hours to waste this summer." He consulted his watch. "Nine o'clock—closing time." He threw his spade over his shoulder, picked up the lantern, and dashed up the bank through the bushes at a pace that left Peter, who didn't know every foot of the ground with the certainty of his companion, far in the rear.

After that, Little Peter, who was decidedly not persistent, lost interest. "The fellow's crazy," was Peter's opinion. "Anyhow, he's too good for us. Old man Smith had better put a big detective like

Mr. Burns on his trail. I'm convinced that he's responsible for anything queer that happens around here ——"

"Don't talk till you've got evidence," said Johnny Andrews severely. Johnny intended to be either a great detective or a famous criminal lawyer when he was older, and insisted upon observing the rules of the game. "So far," he reminded the others, "we haven't any evidence at all."

"That's so," agreed Dick. "We're wasting our time. Instead of being down watching Fresh Pond and that crazy-head 'digging for fish-worms,' we belong up on Judge Smith's place, on the chance that the ghost-racket happens again."

"Sure, we belong there," said Johnny. "Let's interview the Judge and tell him so. Just because he thinks that 'fraid-cat little girl will worry if she sees us around, is no reason for him to keep us out."

"He's probably forgotten all about us and the ghost too," scoffed Little Peter. "The ghost probably wasn't anything but that 'fraid-cat kid's bad dreams. Nobody would have thought of it again, if it hadn't happened on the night of the Parkes' burglary."

"Then there was Regent's cutting up," put in Dick, "which showed that we had suspicious characters around our place. But see here, this

boy always stops at nine. His rushing off from you, Peter, wasn't any trick he put up on you. He always cuts for home at exactly nine o'clock, and before ten their house is as dark as Egypt."

"No evidence," grumbled businesslike Johnny again. "We don't know that he stays in the dark house—only that he goes in. But probably Peter's right. Probably there won't be any more ghost. And probably this smart youth named Lawrence we-don't-know-what will fool us all summer. So let's get busy helping Dick here to sail his boat to the limit in the big race. Mother saw the cups down at the Inn yesterday, and she said they're peaches. A motor-boat is nice for ladylike picnics, but I wish I had the real thing, like Dick."

And then, that very afternoon, there was a dead calm on the bay and hardly a puff of wind on the open sea, and, as there was nothing to be done about sailing and the late afternoon was pleasanter for tennis, the boys decided to go down to the watch-tower and talk to the old captains.

Mrs. Miggs had told Nancy about the watch-tower. It was down at the Neck, out on the end of the longest wharf: a squatty little tower, but high enough to command a long stretch of sea.

"The old captains sit there," Mrs. Miggs explained, "after they're too old to sail any longer. Cap'n Silas Baker, he's lame, 'n' Cap'n John Mace,

he's lamer, so's he can jest drag up the tower steps. Cap'n Cyrus Mixter, he's blind, the dear old man. They're the four regulars, always on hand. Captain Porter's younger, but he's the deafest of the lot. He fishes a little in summer, but most of the time he sets and smokes with the rest up in the tower. Captain Blades comes when his wife don't need him, and is willing. They set in a row with their chairs teetered back aginst the wall and smoke and talk. They love to have strangers come in on 'em. Maybe you girls would find it a little smoky, but your brothers would admire to hear the stories they've got to tell, and they'd admire to tell 'em."

This sounded entertaining. Johnny wanted to know if the "Banks" where the fishermen went were made of fog or something more solid, and just how one caught lobsters. Dick looked forward to wild tales of storm and shipwreck, with dramatic rescues to follow. Peter hoped that some of the captains had been with the sponge fleets, and could give him points on professional diving. As they walked down to the Neck, discussing all these interesting possibilities, their pace grew faster and faster, until they almost ran down the long wharf and up the tower stairs. But though they took no pains to be quiet as they reached the door of the dusky loft, where the old captains sat, watch-

ing the sea through the great doors that fronted the water and were always open in fair weather, not a captain noticed the visitors. They were not sitting in a row against the wall; only one was smoking; they were not pining for listeners, or for a chance of entertaining gossip, as Mrs. Miggs had represented—or rather they were already provided with entertainment, apparently of the most thrilling nature. In the corner, on a pile of nets, where its owner had tossed it, lay a green cap with a tiny green feather tucked in its band. Over by the wide-flung doors sat the Green Knight in the center of an excited circle of alert old men. On the boy's knees was spread the tattered paper that the three intruders had seen so many times laid out on the flat rock. The boy was reading from it, while the eager old men stared at the writing—all but one, blind old Captain Mixter, who gazed sightlessly in the direction of the boy's voice.

"'East of ye bay there is a pond,'" read the boy, "'and on ye east side of ye pond there is an oak tree ten yards from ye waterside.'" The boy paused. "It would be dead by now, of course, but seems to me I've tried every stump——"

The blind captain lifted his thin hand. "It's not Fresh Pond that's meant, my boy. It's the old horse-pond up on the Miggs farm—that's

Judge Smith's place now, and all the Point land beyond him belonged to it."

"What say? Speak up, Cyrus," demanded "deef" Captain Porter.

"I say Fresh Pond wa'n't there in the old days," repeated Captain Mixter loudly. "You all know that. Down in the holler behind the big house, right where the man that built 'Gray Gables,' as they call it, put his biggest barn,—there's the place that's meant. There's wood and rocks there —'bout all that feller that fixed it up saw fit to leave. He was great for smoothing off and cutting down. He dreened his horse-pond down into the swamp that's Fresh Pond now. The others dreened down there too—put all the waste water together and planted lilies. It makes the Point more sightly, I must say, but it's changed all the old landmarks." The blind man sighed. "You look for your oak stump and your rock up behind that barn."

"I see," said the boy slowly. "I thought perhaps that was it from something that's written in here in my grandfather's writing. I tried up there one morning before breakfast, but I sort of hated ——"

"How are you, mates?" broke in "deef" Captain Porter, who, happening to look up, had discovered the three visitors hesitating in the door.

"Come and join us, if you so please," he added sociably.

The Green Knight looked up, and quick as a flash but with deft gentleness he folded the precious paper and tucked it away in a big black wallet.

"I must be off," he said, rising and nodding a friendly nod around the circle of captains and then at the boys. "I'll be in again soon, and here's some of that stick-candy you fellows said you liked." He pulled a square package out of his pocket and laid it in Captain Mixter's hand.

The old captains watched him go wistfully.

"He's one of us," "deef" Captain Porter told the new arrivals. "His granddad was a Halcyon man."

"And what he don't know about the old days!" testified Captain Baker admiringly. "He knows who owned every foot of land round here, from the Revolutionary days down. He knows the names and stories of all our old sailing-vessels. He's up on town history. He could draw a map of the Miggs farm and the Baker farm and half a dozen next beyond 'em. He's a great boy."

"What's he looking for down by Fresh Pond?" demanded Johnny daringly.

"That's his affair," snapped Captain Mixter.

"He's a great chum of ourn," Captain Baker

apologized for the other's curtness. "Drops in 'most every day. Tells us his private business, knowing it's safe with us."

"Oh, that's all right," said Johnny. "What's his name?"

Captain Baker considered. "Dunno's I ever heard him say." He raised his voice for Captain Porter's benefit. "Any of you recollect hearing his name?"

Nobody did.

Captain Mixter began to reminisce. "I recollect that old horse-pond jest as well. Swam across it first year I learned. There was one deep place, over my head, and the fresh water didn't hold you up like the bay. Sam Miggs—he was jest my size—he stood on the bank and watched me come. I remember how scared he looked. It wa'n't over my head for mor'n two yards, I s'pose. The big barn's right over that hole."

Silent little Captain Blades turned solemnly to the newcomers. "Any of you belong in Halcyon?"

"We've been coming here three summers," volunteered Dick.

"Umph, summer folks!" commented Captain Blades. "Any of you sailed the seas to furrin parts?"

"I'm going to Japan the first chance I get," volunteered Little Peter.

"That boy's been round the world more than once," asserted Captain Mixter proudly. "He's touched at more furrin ports than any of us. He's lived in furrin ports."

"We thought perhaps you'd spin us some yarns," suggested Dick, half-heartedly, because he was more interested now in comparing views on the Green Knight's behavior with Peter and Johnny than in the most thrilling sea-tales.

But Captain Mixter settled the matter. "Not to-day, mates," he objected, "not to-day. We've got business to tend to—'bout some old landmarks. You wouldn't be interested. Any other day, when we're not so busy, we'd admire to talk to you."

Down on the sunny road the three friends stopped to size up the situation.

"Well, he's done us again," said Peter. "Seems he can be chummy enough when he wants to, but he picks his company."

"What do you gather he's after?" queried Dick.

"I've got it!" cried Peter triumphantly, after a pause. "The writing-machine lady with the green veil is getting up a history of Halcyon,—tidy little souvenirs to sell to the summer colony. Green Cap is hunting material for it—old maps and things."

"You don't make maps with a spade," objected

Johnny. "You don't dig up materials for a history book out of the ground."

"Oh, well," conceded Peter irritably, "of course that's something else he's at. Can't a fellow be at two things at once? Maybe it's fish-worms, as he said, and maybe it's —— Well, I'm going to the library to read up on the history of that Miggs farm," announced Peter suddenly. "You two can go and beat the girls at tennis, if you feel like it. I'm going to run this mystery down."

But Peter, delving till dinner-time in the stuffy little reading-room on the Neck, unearthed nothing at all notable about an oak, a rock, or a horse-pond on the Miggs farm, now portioned off between "Gray Gables" and a dozen other summer residences. And Peter might have saved himself the hot and dusty search through village archives. For next morning as the three boys, accompanied by Alexandra, Cecilia and the Learned twins, were hurrying down to the bathing-beach, Judge Smith hailed them from his big limousine.

"Haven't you detectives any report to make?" he demanded, twinkling at the boys genially, as they stood in an embarrassed row in front of him. "I thought you couldn't have run the creature down, because we had another visitation last night. I got back from the West at midnight, and before four I was waked by the most unearthly yelling I

ever want to hear. I'm using Clare's rooms now. They're the only ones the haunt cares for, it seems, so there may have been plenty of other visitations while I was away. You fellows couldn't arrange with your families to come up and sleep for a while? Not that I am much bothered by having a haunted house on my hands," chuckled Judge Smith, "but I sort of like the idea of a ghost hunt and so does Clare, now that she's got over her scare a little. Besides,"—he laughed again,—"I've got a hunt for buried treasure going on back of my barn, and a Sedan chair stored in my garage, so three young detectives in charge of a ghost-hunt on the third story seems to complete the picture."

"I say," demanded Johnny Andrews, after the three had exchanged doubtful glances, "are you guying us, Judge Smith?"

"Guying you?" repeated Judge Smith irascibly. "Certainly not, young man. What gives you that impression?"

"Well," began Johnny, "we're in earnest, you see, Judge. We're trying to find the real person who's annoying you, and who maybe robbed Mr. Parke also. We don't believe in ghosts, and of course we know you don't. And a hunt for buried treasure sounds like some other kind of a fake ——"

"Fake!" broke in Judge Smith, "fake! Well,

I guess not. The young man who's doing the hunting has a permit that descended to him from his grandfather to search my premises. The grandfather got it from the son of the ancient owner of my place, and it's dated 1831. I haven't a word to say in the matter. Besides, I like it. Do you mean to say"—he frowned at the three boys—"do you mean to say that you're not interested in a genuine hunt for buried treasure? Why, when I was the age of you fellows I'd have been sprinting down the road half-way back to my place by now, to watch it."

"It's that boy with the green cap, of course," said Peter.

"Um—you know him, do you?" asked Judge Smith.

"By sight," explained Peter. "He's been measuring and digging down by Fresh Pond—we didn't know why. Evidently he didn't find anything there, but he wouldn't tell us what he was doing."

"Is that so?" said Judge Smith. "That's funny. But then he had to tell me, naturally. I noticed he didn't seem very sociable—shy, maybe. Well now, the point is this: can you boys be on hand, two at a time, say, to try to get a line on this—night-prowler, or, to be quite accurate, night-howler. We'll discontinue using the misleading

term that I applied before, though I must say the noise I heard was the most unearthly, inhuman shrieking I can imagine. I don't blame Clare at all for getting hysterical over it. Can you begin to-night?"

The detectives solemnly agreed to have two of the firm on hand that very evening, prepared to sleep in the noise-haunted chamber, and then started off after the girls.

"Hi! hi!" called Judge Smith before they had gone far. "There's another thing I want to consult you boys about, though I will admit"—he turned to the sceptical Johnny—"this thing does sound a good deal like a joke. I'm out looking for a girl with big brown eyes—a little girl, who does errands for somebody or other around here. Nobody knows what errand brought her to my house, but my spoilt grandchild Clare wants her back. So I'm out with a list of all the possible places that might have sent her ——"

"Has she big bright brown eyes?" demanded Peter. "Quite remarkable eyes, and lots of enthusiasm and go in her manner?"

"Sounds like it," snapped Judge Smith. "Who is your girl?"

"That's Hope Haskins. She works at the Inn, and she's a friend of his sister's"—Peter indicated Dick with a gesture.

"Well!" The old man was running down the long list of establishments that might have sent a girl out on an errand to "Gray Gables." "The Inn's not here. I'll try it first, though—just like a pack of servants to remember all but the right place. Good-bye, boys. To the Inn, Thomas."

"Well, of all queer old parties!" said Dick, watching the big car out of sight. "The Green Knight hasn't much on him for queerness! Starting out to find a girl with nice brown eyes ——"

"And finding her first clip," put in Peter. "That's his style. Crazy over this Green Knight's hunt for buried treasure ——"

"Say, that's what I thought of yesterday," broke in Peter again, "after we'd been to see the captains. I thought buried treasure would about fit the case. Only it sounded too wild, so I kept still."

"Nothing's too wild to be true nowadays," said Johnny. "Truth is stranger than fiction. Has anybody any new theories about this night-howler? And who's going to sleep up there on the first shift?"

CHAPTER XIII

A COSTLY VICTORY

"Isn't it hot?"

"The hotter the better for tennis."

"If you could see yourself, Alice Knapp, you'd realize the disadvantages of heat."

"Well, I'd rather have a good time and look like a lobster than sit around in a fluffy white dress and groan about how hot I am," said Jane Learned, dropping down on the grass beside the Lees' tennis-court.

It was the day of the much-heralded tennis tournament. Jane had just been badly beaten by Alice Knapp, a tow-headed girl from the Inn. Louise Minot, the other two Inn girls, and Alexandra had been eliminated in the first round. The next match was between Cecilia Green and Christina Learned, and the winner would play Alice Knapp in the finals. To be sure, there was also Nancy Lee, who had let her name go into the drawing as a mere formality. There were eight players without Nancy, and, as her name came out of Peter Little's hat last, she would not have

to play, or default, until the very last round, when she would meet the winner of all the other matches. This Dick and Peter, who had both managed tournaments at school, declared to be the professional method of handling the situation.

Dick, Peter, and Johnny Andrews were general managers of the tournament. All the young people on the Point and at the Inn had been invited to look on, so there was a noisy and enthusiastic "gallery," which clapped all the good shots impartially and inspired the players to do their best.

"I don't mean to fuss about the heat," said the girl who had commented on Alice Knapp's wilted appearance, "but I do hate the sun in my face. I'm going to move."

"You'll certainly melt if you sit on the other side of the court," advised somebody, "with the sun on your back."

"Well, I'll try melting then, if necessary," said the girl, "for I'm certainly tired of squinting. But how about the end of the court? It seems quite shady there."

"Oh, lemonade!" cried Alexandra Little, spying Rosa coming down the path with a great bowl, followed by Josephine, strutting importantly along with a tray of glasses.

So it happened that when Cecilia and Christina

began to play, a few of the spectators still sat facing the sun on the side-line, and all the others who were not off under a big tree drinking lemonade were gathered in a spot of shade at Christina's end of the court.

"Love-fifteen!"

"Love-thirty!"

"Fifteen-thirty!"

"Fifteen-forty!"

"Game!"

Cecilia's game. Cecilia was serving splendidly; Christina could not get one of her swift, low balls. But Christina won on her serve. Games were then one-all. After that Christina lost steadily. Games were one-two, one-three, one-four, two-four, the score always in Cecilia's favor.

"I say, Nancy, you'll have to go into the finals and do up C. Green." Little Peter, who had been "hustling" lemonade for those who still kept their places by the tennis-court, strolled up to Nancy's chair.

"Oh, I can't play," Nancy assured him. "I might just as well have defaulted in the first place. It would be awfully careless for me to race around on a weak ankle."

"I thought you said it wasn't weak any more."

"Well, it isn't, really," laughed Nancy, "but I don't suppose it can be perfectly strong yet. Be-

sides, Peter, I can't believe it would be fair for me to step in at the end, after the winner of all the other matches is tired, and try to beat her."

"It's perfectly fair," insisted Peter. "Luck was with you, that's all, in the drawing. There were nine entries, including you. You were drawn out last—number nine. The first eight pair, then the four winners pair, and so on, and you draw a blank each time. 'Drawing a bye' is the technical expression for it. You have a perfect right to play."

"Thirty-all!" called Cecilia, who was serving. "Play!"

"Oh, isn't it——" began Christina, and dived after the flying ball. It was her point.

"And my game too, I think, Cecilia," she explained, coming up to the net. "The score before that was forty-fifteen in my favor. That makes the games three to four."

"Oh, no!" objected Cecilia eagerly. "It was thirty-all before, just as I said. I made doubles once, and you got one little low ball just over the net."

"And one in the back of the court."

"Oh, that one was out," said Cecilia decisively. "I may not have called it so you heard, but it was at least a foot out."

"It was!" Christina stepped back into her place, a worried look on her small face. The

game that she had thought safely hers must be won all over again.

"Thirty-forty! Play!"

Christina ran too far forward, and the ball dropped into the net on her side.

"Deuce. Play!"

Christina "lobbed" her return high in the air, and everybody waited breathlessly for it to come down.

"Out!" called Cecilia, promptly, as it struck.

"The dust flew, C.! It must have been on the line," called Peter.

"There's a smutch of white outside the line just here," retorted Cecilia easily. "That ball was out: I was right beside it, and I saw it distinctly. You can't possibly see my lines from that end of the court."

"I say, Nancy,"—Peter came back to Nancy's side,—"you ought to have an umpire for this match. That ball was in. C. juggles scores when it suits her. That's why I don't want her to win out."

Nancy blushed and looked anxiously to see if any one had overheard Peter's confidence. "Oh, Peter, I can't believe that she meant to be unfair. And how can I suggest having an umpire now, when we haven't had one all the time before? It would be insulting to Cecilia."

"No more than to Miss Learned."

"She's losing."

"Yes, and that's the whole trouble. We boys are managing this match. I'm going to have one of the Shaws umpire the next set. We ought to have had an umpire and a score-keeper all the time."

Nancy's troubled face cleared. "Cecilia won't mind having an umpire if it's one of the Shaws. You're a very tactful person, Peter."

"Sure, I am." Peter ran off gaily to make his arrangements. Unfortunately, not knowing the Shaw brothers intimately, Peter chose the wrong one—the slow one. Cecilia's decisive "Out" or "In" was merely echoed by the umpire, and as Christina offered no objections, things went on much as before, all doubtful points being scored in Cecilia's favor.

"Managers will umpire and keep score for finals," announced Peter briskly, when, after a short rest, Cecilia announced that she was ready to play again.

"And you'll chase our balls too," added Cecilia, with a scathing glance at Peter.

"All right," agreed Peter serenely, taking his place on Alice Knapp's side of the court.

But it was no use. Cecilia had seen the flash of determination in her cousin Peter's eyes, and

she yielded perforce, and then proceeded to get her way in spite of him.

"Cecilia will win," Alexandra told Nancy early in the match. "When she looks like that, she's mad about something, and when she's mad she plays like a streak."

And indeed it was by sheer good playing that Cecilia won this time.

Christina Learned, who sat down on the ground at Nancy's feet to rest from her vigorous exertions, looked up at Nancy earnestly. "She's really a fine player, Nancy. I wish we'd had—people to chase our balls, you know. But perhaps I couldn't have beaten her even then. I'm sorry. I ought to learn to stick up for myself better."

Christina looked very small and tired and pathetic as she spoke. Nancy felt ashamed of having invited her to Halcyon, and then let Cecilia treat her so unfairly. Cecilia, over on the tennis-court, was shaking hands with Alice and boasting gaily that she never played her best unless people were watching.

"And then I did want the first prize," added Cecilia. "I've seen it, you know, and ——"

"Cecilia, I'll play you whenever you're rested." Nancy Lee tried hard to make her announcement sound perfectly casual and good-natured. If she

owed something to Christina, Cecilia, too, was her guest in another way.

"Oh, I thought you'd defaulted. I'm ready any time," returned Cecilia, the hard little smile that Alexandra had spoken of settling again tight around her mouth.

"Nancy, do you think you ought to play?" demanded Christina in a frightened voice.

"I only know that I can't resist," laughed Nancy. "Where's Jane? I let her use my racquet."

Jane was down on the wharf. "I thought I should explode and disgrace you, Nancy, if I watched any more of Cecilia's tennis," she explained, "but I'll come back now and root wildly for Fair Oaks. Good for you, Nancy!"

"I think you ought to ask your mother about playing, Nancy," cautioned Christina.

"I can't. She and Mrs. Little got tired of watching us and went off for a walk. Besides, it's all right. I can't sit around forever!"

By this time Nancy was in her most careless, irresponsible mood. She had almost forgotten the avenging of Christina; she was going into the match because she wanted a good, hard game of tennis on her own court, which she had never yet played on. She wanted the fun and excitement of playing Cecilia, and perhaps of beating her. She was tired of being cautious and sensible,—but

she would be very careful of her ankle. She would keep thinking every minute that she mustn't turn it or twist it or jump high and come down hard on that ankle.

It was a bad handicap, being so fearfully out of practice. Nancy lost three straight games to Cecilia, and after each one the hard little smile deepened around Cecilia's mouth.

"Any time you like we can rest a little," suggested Cecilia, cool and unruffled, while Nancy puffed and panted from the unaccustomed exercise.

"Thanks," said Nancy, "but this is a regular match. We can rest when it's over. Play your best! I shall."

Nancy's racquet caught one of Cecilia's swift, low balls and dropped it over the net into an unprotected corner of the court with the beautiful easy swing that is real tennis. After that stroke all Nancy's skill seemed to come back. She played like a whirlwind, all over her court. Swift and sure, she slammed her balls on the back line, the side lines, wherever they were most surely out of Cecilia's reach.

The spectators applauded excitedly. The games piled up and up for Nancy. And the ankle never gave a twinge. It would have been nonsense to miss this splendid, splendid game!

The first set was Nancy's. In the second,

Cecilia, who had been taken unawares by Nancy's sudden spurt, fought gallantly for every point. There were long, exciting rallies; swift "smashes" close to the net; maddening "lobs" that made Cecilia so nervous with their slow, wavering descent that she invariably missed them; low, back-court balls that always proved too much for Nancy, who whacked at them, but only succeeded in making extra work for the ball-chasing umpires.

The score tied at four games all. The fifth game went to Nancy. The sixth must be hers too, Nancy decided swiftly. If she lost and the games stood at five-all, that meant a long deuce set that would weary players and spectators alike. To cap the climax, the sixth game was a deuce game. Back and forth went the score: deuce, vantage in, deuce, vantage out, deuce. Neither player seemed able to win three points in succession.

Vantage out! That meant that Nancy was ahead. One point more and the set and match would be hers.

"I will get it. I will! I must!" Nancy whispered to herself, as Cecilia made ready to serve.

"Give her a smasher, Cecilia!"

"Win the point, Nancy!"

"Go for it, Cecilia!"

The gallery comment disturbed Cecilia, who served the first ball out of bounds.

"Careful!" called Cecilia's partisans.

"Make it doubles!" advised Nancy's.

Recklessly Cecilia served another swift ball. It was in, and Nancy returned it. Cecilia sent it back. By a phenomenal rush Nancy was on hand in time to "lob" it to her opponent. Steadily Cecilia bided her time and sent back a splendid ball close to the back line of Nancy's court. Coolly Nancy swung the ball back to her opponent. This time Cecilia dropped it just over the net.

"Oh!" breathed Nancy, and ran forward. She couldn't get there in time! She must! Desperately she reached for the ball, hit it with the rim of her racquet, lost her balance, and slid to her knees on the court, just as the ball, hanging precariously on the top edge of the net for an instant, dropped lifelessly to the ground in Cecilia's court and rolled maddeningly toward her.

"Game, set, series. Nancy Lee wins," called Johnny, who was umpire-in-chief.

"That was a lucky stroke, Nancy. I congratulate you."

Cecilia stood by the net, holding out the conventional hand to the victor. But Nancy, very white and solemn, sat huddled on the ground, one foot—the one that belonged to the bad ankle—twisted under her.

SHE REACHED FOR THE BALL

"Now I've—done—it—again!" gasped Nancy Lee.

In a minute everybody understood what had happened and rushed forward to help Nancy up, to scold, to sympathize, to run for Rosa and Mrs. Lee, to telephone the doctor, to decide between bringing Nancy to the green bench or the green bench to Nancy.

"Goodness!" sighed Nancy, as she and the bench, having been somehow united, were being carried up to the house. "What a mess you can make of things in just a minute!"

"Doctor Jennings isn't in—won't be till late this evening."

"We can't find your mother anywhere."

"Dick and Johnny can carry you right upstairs."

"Alexandra's bringing the prize, and your racquet."

Nancy, sick and dull with the throbbing pain, stared whitely at the sea of faces, listened, only half comprehending, to the torrent of comment and question, then shut her eyes to keep out the rushing, dizzying procession of people and things that seemed to swirl and eddy around her swaying couch.

"Do anything you want to," she murmured. "It hurts too much—I can't think."

"Oh, has anything happened? Can I help?"

It was a new voice, with a little thrill in it that made Nancy open her eyes. There standing close beside her was Mrs. Roger Dale, the pretty bride who did not know about stove-dampers.

"Oh, how do you do?" Nancy tried hard to be cordial to the new guest, but Mrs. Dale cut her short.

"You're hurt, poor child. Is it the ankle again? What a shame! Oh, I can see that it's paining you cruelly. Shall I call my husband—he's waiting for me out in the road. Unless your own doctor —— Oh, I ought to say that my husband is a doctor too. He'll be only too glad to help. Of course I think he's quite wonderful in his line, and sprains happen to be in his line."

Mrs. Roger Dale did not know anything about dampers; with the aid of ten cook-books she could not achieve a respectable breakfast. But she knew how to send home a crowd of panicky young people in record time, without hurting any one's feelings. She was an adept at hurrying Rosa with hot water, at consoling frightened little Josephine, and making Dick and the Learned twins feel that they were managing everything splendidly, with just a little of her help. As for Doctor Roger Dale, he was handsome enough, Nancy decided, to be the husband of Mrs. Roger; and he had a smile

that made you like him and eyes that assured you he could be trusted. He did strange things to Nancy's ankle, rubbing and kneading it until he brought the tears to his patient's eyes. But he promised wonderful results, if Nancy would let him work over the sprain once or twice more.

"A new method," he explained. "I'm just back from a year in the European hospitals. No need of being laid up long with a sprain nowadays, if you're willing to be hurt a good bit at first."

"I mustn't forget to tell you why I stopped here to-day," Mrs. Dale explained to Nancy just before she left. "It's to ask about that dear little girl you sent out to me the other day. Oh, the little cakes were delicious, but the girl who brought them was even more of a gift. She showed me all about my stove, and it's cooked splendidly ever since. But she flew away before I'd even thanked her. Could I—would she be offended if I made her a little present—of money? She told me how she was trying to pay her way through college."

Nancy considered. "I don't know whether she'd take it, Mrs. Dale, but you needn't be afraid to ask her. Hope Haskins is the kind you can talk things right out with."

"That's the proper spirit," exulted Jane, when the Dales had gone. "We're playing 'em off

against each other, Nancy, in grand style. Hope needs money. Mrs. Dale needs wisdom about dampers. I believe almost everybody in this world has something extra that he would be glad to swap for something he wants. The only trouble is to start the right criss-crosses."

"And another trouble," said Nancy soberly, "is to remember your own special job, that nobody else can possibly do for you. Mine was to get ready to help mother as soon as I could, and getting mad at Cecilia and sorry for Christina made me forget it."

"Oh, dear!" sighed poor Christina sadly.

"Well, it won't be but a few extra days," Nancy consoled her, "if Doctor Dale is right. And anyway I'm the only one to blame, and it isn't any use to worry now."

"Life is awfully complicated, when you're trying to do things," sighed Jane. "Let's go up to the Dolphin, Christina, and see how the curl in its tail is working so far. Nancy will want to know, and besides, Mrs. Lee will be back soon, and mistakes are a lot easier to explain to a mother when you have her all by yourself."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BEST MOVE IN THE LOOKOUT GAME

THE curl in the Dolphin's tail worked. Business looked up the first day; on the second, it was still brisker. On the third three carriages appeared on the Point roads marked with the tea-shop sign. Miss Willis's nephew, with his five-cent fare to the Dolphin, was getting altogether more than his share of trade. People laughingly called him the jitney 'bus-man and went to the Dolphin first, whatever their ultimate destination. The other carriage-drivers eagerly adopted the popular sign.

Nancy had to hear all this exciting news from the twins, who diversified quiet afternoons in the Birdcage with her by rushing off up the road to a spot whence the Dolphin piazza was visible.

"Crowded!" they reported eagerly, after nearly every trip.

"We saw some people going off in a carriage with a regular load of garden sticks," little Christina added more than once.

"They must have bought at least a dozen," elaborated Jane. "Every little helps."

Once, on the third afternoon, commissioned by Mrs. Lee, they went inside to buy cakes, and Hope, her eyes blazing with happy excitement, confirmed all their highest hopes.

"Seems as if we'd really got started at last," she declared. "People are all so curious about the queer little sticks. They come in to ask questions and they always buy something. We're all so happy! Tell Nancy that our things are almost beginning to wear out."

"You're staying on, of course?" Jane questioned.

Hope nodded. "Such a funny thing happened the other day. The old gentleman at 'Gray Gables' came to the Inn and asked for me and wanted to hire me to amuse his grandchild—the little sick girl that Nancy knows and Miss Willis makes lovely dresses for. He was fearfully angry when I said I couldn't leave the Inn. But after I'd explained how I'd been engaged for the whole summer and how it wouldn't be honorable to stop right in the busy month, when I'm most needed, he was all right about it. I told him I might be able to let him have my extra afternoons, if the Dolphin didn't improve, and he's coming to-day to see. I hope he won't be cross at the poor Dolphin."

"Nancy says he's awfully rich," suggested

Christina. "Perhaps he'd pay you more than the others do."

"Oh, yes, he offered me more," said Hope quietly, "but when you've given your word, you can't let the amount of pay make a difference."

"I'm more and more convinced of the beauty of my system," Jane told Nancy, after they had given her the latest news from Hope. "Play off your Lookout cases against one another and if possible make both parties swap extra things they've got and can't use for things they need. That saves us all kinds of trouble. Only it's a bit difficult arranging matters for the best interests of everybody," sighed Jane. "For instance, if we hadn't resuscitated the Dolphin, we could have swapped some of Judge Smith's money, which Hope needs so badly, for Hope's recipe for happiness, which the grumbling Clare needs even more. That would have been a very good swap."

"Well, what's the next best?" demanded practical little Christina.

"There's another 'case' that's got what Clare needs"—Nancy joined eagerly in the discussion. "There's the Miggs child with her 'grit and good spirits.' But I don't see how we're going to bring the two of them together."

"Lawrence Who-are-you is a happy-sounding person," put in Jane. "I should think the

naughty, woebegone Clare would adore watching his treasure hunt."

"But what can she swap back to him, Jane?" queried the practical twin anxiously.

"Friendship," retorted Jane promptly. "That boy needs friends, I should say, particularly influential friends like the very rich Smiths of 'Gray Gables' to vouch for him and his mother. Judge Smith appears to like him, according to what the boys say, but he doesn't know anything definite about him. Children are great at finding things out. Clare could find out all about the queerness of Lawrence what's-his-name's family, and she could tell her grandfather; and if ever the time comes when they need somebody to speak up for them ——"

"No, Jane," interposed Nancy hastily. "You don't understand about Clare. She's not the kind of child to make friends with anybody. The other person has to do all that. You've got to coax her and amuse her and cuddle her and make her do as you want and not mind what she says to you. Oh, cheering up Clare is a big job! I don't believe any boy could do it. Certainly not a boy as queer as the Green Knight."

"All right," agreed Jane disconsolately. "Maybe we'll have to do it ourselves. The swap system is a wonder, if I did invent it myself, but no system

is perfect. There will always be things left over for the managers to attend to."

"Well, I want the little Miggs child attended to more than anybody," insisted Christina. "She's the saddest case of all we have. Think hard, Nancy, while we're gone, how we can do something for her."

Doctor Dale was coming to massage Nancy's ankle, and the twins had seized the opportunity to let Bill and Joe conduct them out to Baxter's Reef.

When she had sped them on the way, Nancy lay back in her chair thinking hard—not at first about Mrs. Miggs's brave little grandchild, but about all the happenings of the summer. Never until last spring had she been interested in anything beyond her own affairs—her own good times and her friends and family. And then had come that big overwhelming interest—Timmy. For a while she had thought only of him. Now her head was full of a tangled maze of other people's affairs, especially other people's troubles. No one of these people was as dear to her as Timmy. But they all mattered, though none were intimate friends, none mixed up with Nancy's own personal happiness. She wanted them all to come out right, like the end of a story; to find their "places in the sun" in the phrase

that Miss Marshall had explained to them so beautifully in her farewell talk at Fair Oaks School. And it did seem as if Nancy could help a little, with Jane to think of lovely things like flower-sticks and the swapping system, and Christina to say, "Will it work?" whenever impractical Jane and careless Nancy were inclined to go too fast and expect too much.

Christina had bidden Nancy think hard about Mrs. Miggs's grandchild, and finally Nancy got to her. She didn't like to think very hard about another girl who could never walk; having to lie in bed day after day cast such a big black shadow over the sunshine of living. And Mrs. Miggs had said there was no help for it. Wasn't there? All the youth and hope in Nancy cried out in revolt against the idea of a lifetime of suffering.

Trying to imagine what it would be like to be hopelessly crippled, Nancy closed her eyes, to shut out the shady, flower-decked piazza, the lovely wooded slope, the gleaming, sun-kissed, wind-swept harbor. To be in bed in rather a dark, homely little room in a shabby little house down on the Neck, to lie there year in and year out, till you were old and died,—or perhaps it wouldn't be so long. Two tears squeezed under Nancy's tight-closed lids and streamed down her cheeks.

"Oh, good-afternoon!" called a rather embar-

rassed voice from the boat-house path. "Perhaps I shouldn't have come in by way of your wharf."

It was Doctor Dale. In a flash Nancy brushed away those two silly tears and assured her visitor rather haughtily that he was perfectly welcome to use the wharf and the path, if he found it more convenient. Her haughty manner was due, of course, to annoyance at having been caught crying and not being able to explain the reason. Doctor Dale would think she was impatient at having to stay quiet on such a lovely day. Well, he would have to go on thinking so; it would seem even sillier to explain that she had imagined herself bedridden, and cried about that!

"I've been sailing," explained Doctor Dale, in an obvious effort to cheer his melancholy patient. "Sorry I'm late. There's a bully wind outside the breakwater, but we had to tack in from there, and that's slow work. Ankle bothering any? May I look at it right here?"

Being kneaded and poked and patted and pounded didn't hurt much to-day. For a while Nancy watched the doctor's deft hands with interest; then his performance grew monotonous and her thoughts wandered back to the other girl. Forgetting all about the doctor, Nancy shut her eyes again and was back once more in the cheerless

little room in the shabby house down on the Neck. Poor little child! Nancy was rather weak and nervous from all that she had been through; hard things seemed harder to her just now than ordinarily they would. Again those two pitying tears squeezed out and slipped down her cheeks. Indignant at herself, Nancy opened her eyes, proudly ignoring the tears, in the hope that Doctor Dale hadn't noticed them. But the hateful man, who had not once lifted his eyes before from the level of Nancy's ankle, was staring anxiously up into her face.

"I'm sorry," he blurted out in eager apology. "I hadn't any idea that I was hurting you badly. You should have stopped me."

"You haven't hurt one bit," Nancy assured him hastily. "It's not that at all."

"Oh, I know," the doctor nodded sagely. "Sitting tight and missing all the fun that's going does make anybody blue and miserable. But you can walk now. Try it."

Obediently Nancy jumped up and paced back and forth on the piazza.

"Why, it's perfectly wonderful!" she cried. "Only four days, and that ankle doesn't wobble a bit. It goes beautifully. Oh, thank you so much, Doctor Dale!"

"Don't cry any more about a little thing like

that ankle," advised the doctor, hiding embarrassment under a brusque manner.

"Oh, but I wasn't!" denied Nancy. "I was—it sounds pretty silly, but I was just trying to imagine how it would feel not to be able to walk again ever."

"Was that all the confidence you had in me?" scoffed back the doctor gaily.

"Oh, you don't understand yet!" Nancy began all over again patiently. "I wasn't thinking of myself at all. I heard about a poor little crippled child who lives down on the Neck, and I was thinking of her and being sorry for her. Her grandmother is the nurse who came here to rub my other ankle—I mean she came the other time I hurt it. She told me about the child."

"Well, you mustn't tell me about any crippled children." Doctor Dale seated himself comfortably on the piazza-railing and smiled quizzically down at Nancy. "I'm on my honeymoon and taking a much-needed vacation into the bargain. Of course emergency cases"—he waved his hand at Nancy—"have to be attended to, in spite of honeymoons. But you mustn't get me into anything else."

"Oh, I wasn't," Nancy assured him earnestly. "You couldn't do anything for this little girl, because there's nothing that can be done for her. At

least Mrs. Miggs—that's her grandmother—said so."

"Oh, she did, did she?" said the doctor, now glaring sternly at Nancy. "Nonsense! I don't believe it."

"Oh, don't you really?" cried Nancy eagerly. "Wouldn't it be splendid if it wasn't so?"

"Umph!" Doctor Roger Dale still glared sternly. "Not so very splendid, as far as I can see—unless they do something for the child."

"Oh, no, of course not," agreed Nancy sadly. "But then"—she brightened—"I'll tell Mrs. Miggs what you've said, and of course she will do something right away, if she can possibly find out what to do."

"She probably can't afford to do it," growled the doctor from his perch on the railing. "Not too sick to be cured, but too poor to be cured: that's the child's complaint, I should judge. It's the complaint of a great many people in this world. You're lucky not to know as much about 'em as I have to."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that." Nancy was determined not to be daunted in her quest for information by Doctor Roger Dale's curious display of ill-temper. Of course if he didn't wish to work during his vacation, he needn't; but it wouldn't hurt him any, now that the subject had come

up, to tell Nancy what Mrs. Miggs should do if she could afford it. "If it doesn't cost too dreadfully much to cure her," Nancy went on eagerly, "maybe we girls could think of a way to make some money for her. Or perhaps they'd give her some of the profits from the big fair they always have at the Inn. It's coming early in August, I think. So if you'd tell me what could be done——"

"My word! You're a determined young lady, aren't you?" A faint smile was twitching at the doctor's stern mouth.

"Why,—maybe I am," admitted Nancy. "But if you knew Mrs. Miggs, I'm sure you'd be determined to help her in any way you could. She's so little and she works so hard, and yet she's the cheerfulest person you can imagine. The grandchild is cheerful too, she says. Why, if she can be cured, Mrs. Miggs will be made!"

"I didn't say the child could be cured!" The doctor was all nettles again. "How absurd! I've never seen her! I don't even know what's the matter with her. You're a very inaccurate young woman."

"But you did say——" began Nancy. The doctor jumped down from his perch on the railing and strolled impatiently off down the long piazza.

"See here!" He wheeled abruptly and came back to Nancy's side. "I haven't yet said any-

thing worth saying. Now I'm going to! You tell this brave little grandmother that if she wants another doctor—young but well trained in a lot of the new surgical wrinkles—to come and see the little lame girl, why, he'd esteem it a privilege to be allowed the opportunity. Now are you satisfied?"

"But you said," gasped Nancy, "that on your vacation ——"

"Can't you see just to look at me," the doctor broke in irascibly, "that I'm not the vacation kind? I can't sit around and play at amusing myself. I've got too much corked up inside me. The world's too sad a place—too many things need setting right. Didn't Marion—my wife—tell you what we're really doing down here, while her father and my mother fondly imagine that I'm resting after two strenuous years in Europe, and making up my mind to accept a fashionable New York surgeon's offer to help him with his highly lucrative practice? She didn't? I understood from her that you're the good angel who sent her the expert on stoves."

"Well, I am! I mean I did," laughed Nancy. "But she only said she wanted to learn to do all the cooking for you."

The doctor smiled affably. "Put it on the grounds of sentiment, did she? Marion's a won-

derful woman; she can keep a secret—her scientific father brought her up that way. But I think you deserve to know why Marion's so hipped on cooking. It's because we're planning to live on nothing much a year in a little house on a dingy city street, and be as happy as two skylarks hunting up all the sick, miserable people and curing 'em, and the stupid, untrained people and telling 'em how to keep well and be happy. Life's going to be one big chance to help—one big adventure of hunting up the people who want what you have to give and then giving it. My mother and Marion's father are bound to be fearfully disappointed, but Marion and I can't see things any other way."

"Oh, how splendid!" Nancy's voice was vibrant with eagerness. "Why, Doctor Dale, your idea is just exactly like the Lookout game that Mrs. Miggs taught me, to cheer me up about my spoiled summer."

"Yes, dearie, and how's the game going now?" demanded another eager voice from the sitting-room door. Then this new voice changed its tone suddenly. "Oh, Miss Nancy!" With frightened, apologetic flutterings of the rusty black bonnet and the much-darned black gloves, little Mrs. Miggs, having suddenly perceived the doctor, stood poised for flight. "That girl was tied up

with her dinner again," she explained, "and she told me to come straight out, as you were alone. When I heard talking, I s'posed it was only the children. I'll run right along."

"Please don't," Nancy begged her. "It's only my new doctor—Doctor Dale, Mrs. Miggs."

The young doctor made his courtliest bow to the shabby little lady, who beamed brightly up at him.

"I heard about Miss Nancy's being so dretful careless," she told him, "and how you're curing her something lovely."

"He's finished the cure already. I can walk now, Mrs. Miggs," cried Nancy, and proved it.

"My! These new ways are beyond me," sighed the little lady. "Makes me wisht I was young and could start where you are."

"So you like new ways, do you?" the doctor asked her.

She nodded briskly. "I like all the good ones," she laughed, "and the queer ones interest me. I s'pose I'm dretful old-fashioned in some things, but I try not to be *sot*. What's the use of living any longer, if you're sure you know it all?"

"There's one thing I don't know that interests me," declared the doctor. "What's this Lookout game that Miss Nancy says you recommend for keeping patients cheerful? A doctor can't know too many devices of that nature."

"I didn't tell her no game," Mrs. Miggs deprecated modestly. "I just give her a hint, and she's done wonders with it. It ain't my game; it's hers. I guess it takes the young to be real good at playin' games, doctor. Now my little granddaughter—the one that's sick—she'd make a game out of anything."

"Does she also play the Lookout game?" demanded the doctor.

Mrs. Miggs shook the little black bonnet sadly. "She couldn't hardly—not the way Miss Nancy does. She hasn't the chances to. But she's got a part in it, all the samey. She's Miss Nancy's best case, isn't she, dearie? Miss Nancy was cheered up something lovely after hearing about my poor little lamb."

Nancy blushed violently. "Well, I hope I have some sense," she defended herself hotly. "A sprained ankle seemed pretty bad at first—before I knew about this quick way of curing it. But Mrs. Miggs told me to be on the lookout for people worse off than I, and I found plenty. That was her part of the game, and the rest that I added was trying to do something to help. It's been lots of fun—but of course you can see that."

"I can," assented the doctor briskly. "In fact I agree with Mrs. Miggs that the best part of the game is what you added. Now don't you let

other people play too? Because—I think I've heard about this little lame child, Mrs. Miggs, and if she's one of Miss Nancy's cases, won't you and Miss Nancy let me get into the game by trying to help her? Of course I can't promise anything, but some of these newfangled ways, as you call them, might work."

Instead of being overjoyed at the offer, as Nancy had expected, little Mrs. Miggs stared hard at her would-be benefactor. "Young man," she began after a moment, "you ain't seeking experience so hard that you'd try silly experiments?"

The young man in question seemed prepared for Mrs. Miggs's suspicions of him. "Yes, I am young," he agreed pleasantly, "but I've already had a good deal of experience, nevertheless. I've studied with ——" He sat down beside Mrs. Miggs and slowly went through an exhaustive account of his medical education. Mrs. Miggs listened attentively, her gloved hands clasped in her lap, until she heard the name of a great foreign surgeon.

"You studied with him?" demanded Mrs. Miggs. "With that very man?"

Doctor Dale nodded. "And I think he'd tell you, if you were to ask him, that I made good in the work he's so splendid at."

"Then"—Mrs. Miggs held out her black-gloved

hands to the doctor, as if in token that she accepted him, and spoke solemnly, as of deep things —"then I know that you're the best chance my baby has of being cured. Sammy Jennings ain't up on the new ways. He's been tied down here all his life, and couldn't go to those foreign places to learn about 'em. But he reads what he can and he's told me that children worse off than my darling has been made as good as new by that great man. And you know his ways? You go ahead and do your best, and I'll thank you with all my heart, and pay you all you ask, if you'll just be a little patient."

"Mrs. Miggs," said the doctor sternly, "don't you know any more than that about the rules of good sport? Don't you know that one always plays the game for the game's sake, and for nothing else? You've done it often enough, I'm sure. Let me have my chance."

"Do!" begged Nancy, who had followed the colloquy with breathless attention. "Please do, Mrs. Miggs! The Lookout game will come out so splendidly if you will."

Mrs. Miggs lifted her little head proudly, and turning from Nancy to the doctor, shook it determinedly.

"See here!" Doctor Dale began after a minute. "This is only a fair exchange, Mrs. Miggs.

Unless I'm a bad guesser, I've been a Lookout case too—or my family has. Isn't that so, Miss Nancy? And Miss Nancy, a perfect stranger, came to our rescue in great shape. Now doesn't that put the matter on a different basis?"

Little Mrs. Miggs considered frowningly for a moment, and then threw out her gloved hands in token of surrender.

"The rules of this game are too much for me, doctor," she smiled. "I guess the principal thing is for you to help my baby if you can. I guess I can't quarrel with you on details, leastways not now," concluded Mrs. Miggs significantly, and made a bird-like dart to the door. "Why, I clean forgot my next appointment," she muttered. Then her voice broke. "I couldn't thank you even if I had the time, which I haven't." And with a telltale flutter of her handkerchief Mrs. Miggs vanished.

CHAPTER XV

THAT FATAL REGATTA

After Nancy's manipulation of what little Christina Learned called "the darlingest swap of all," interest in the Lookout game rather languished. The little White Girl coolly disposed of her own case by striking up a sudden and entirely inexplicable friendship with Billy Lee. For reasons connected with Clare's possession of a pony, Billy reciprocated her friendly advances, and Josephine, model of adoring sisterhood, tagged along, consoled Clare when Billy informed her with boyish candor that she was a 'fraid cat or a silly, and kept Billy in his place by developing a daring in the matter of bareback riding that Billy, try his best, could not equal. Doctor Dale had begun treating Mrs. Miggs's granddaughter, and the hope he held out of a cure, slow but certain, put new heart into the brave little nurse's cheery optimism. Miss Willis, for whom the Dolphin's tail had been so successfully kinked, showed a proper appreciation of her sudden prosperity by sharing it.

"I can afford to pay you more now, and you're

well worth it," she told Hope Haskins. "You're so quick in your motions that you do the work of two girls, and I'd far rather have you than half a dozen."

So Hope's eyes were always starry these days, with the dear Dolphin flourishing beyond her wildest dreams, and college for next fall almost a certainty. Also, there had been two rainy afternoons when tea-shop business was bound to languish—but that was almost a blessing now, because Miss Willis could catch up with orders for garden-sticks—and on both days Miss Willis had told Hope not to stay. These unexpected holidays had been spent with Nancy and the twins. It took a very hard rain indeed to drive the girls in from the Birdcage. There, on her first free afternoon, Hope was duly initiated into the W. W.'s.

"We invented 'em to save Miss I-Forgot Nancy's spoiled jumper," explained Jane, when a mystic ritual, arranged by her, had been finished. "When a thing's spoiled, make a feature of it. That's a good rule to begin life with. Well, first W. W. stood for Woodland Wanderers, which is pretty but tame,—though I may say there wasn't anything tame about one of N. Lee's woodland wanderings. Well, we got tired of that, and changed to Wonder-Workers. That's what you are now, star-eyed Hope, a Wonder-Worker. See that you work 'em."

"Oh, could I?" demanded Hope doubtfully. "Tell me about some. I shouldn't know how to begin."

"At present," Jane informed her majestically, "the Wonder-Workers are principally engaged in helping N. Lee with her Lookout cases. We're a sort of annex to her Lookout game."

"You helped with one case, you know, Hope," interjected Nancy hastily, "that day you went out to Mrs. Dale's and showed her about her stove-dampers."

Hope laughed merrily. "But there was nothing wonderful about that, Nancy dear," she protested. "It was just plain common-sense—just knowing how."

"Knowing how," repeated Jane solemnly, "is the whole thing, more often than not, as nobody realizes better than you. Isn't the owl your sacred bird and an education your highest ambition? At present the W. W.'s are trying to solve the mystery of the queer boy who digs for treasure and his queer mother who wears a green veil. Apply your owlish wisdom to that problem, star-eyed Hope. Have we given you all details to date?"

"I think so," Hope told her, "except whether the boys have heard the ghost since they've been sleeping at 'Gray Gables.'"

The three girls burst out laughing.

"They sleep right through it," explained Christina. "Judge Smith's secretary, who was in the next room, heard the noise faintly through the wall, but he never thought to call the boys, of course. He supposed they were investigating,—quietly, so as not to frighten the creature off. The next night he heard the ghost again and went to knock them up, but he had to go in and shake them before they woke, and by that time, naturally, the cries had stopped. The boys were awfully ashamed."

"Did Judge Smith scold?" asked Hope, who had had an experience of the irascible old gentleman's annoyance.

"No, but he teased them unmercifully," explained Nancy. "Dick and Peter didn't care much, but Johnny Andrews feels dreadfully. He is the soundest sleeper of all, and he doesn't think he can ever be a regular detective, as he'd planned. He tried sitting up in a chair, but he fell out and slept sounder than ever on the floor."

"Well," said Hope philosophically, "it's a good thing he's found out now what he can't do. He can have something else already chosen before he's grown up. It's time I ran home to my tables, Nancy Lee."

"You're sure you can't possibly come with us in Johnny's boat the evening of the regatta?" Nancy asked her. "Peter said to tell you you must."

Hope shook her head sadly. "I was off duty Fourth of July evening, and this time it's my turn to stay in. You can't leave a hotel all to itself, you see. Some of the guests will be sure to stick around the house. Miss Aurelia Pringle is afraid of the night air, and Mr. Richardson hates the water and never goes near it. Then Mrs. Augustus Walker, the one who talks to us about suffrage, has just had what she calls an attack of nerves. Doctor Jennings has been twice to see her, and her bell rings about once in ten minutes. So I shan't have time to sit and sigh for lost joys," ended Hope quaintly.

"We shall sigh for you, Hope," Nancy told her.

"Peter specially," put in Christina.

"Oh, thank you all for that!" cried Hope, quite unconcerned over all the teasing references to Peter. "The weather report says fair and warmer to-morrow, so there ought to be plenty of moonlight." Hope gave a little sigh. "I haven't ever been out in a boat by moonlight. Touch the little silver ripples for me, Nancy dear, and look hard for mermaids. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Cinderella!" called Jane. "Five

is your fatal hour, instead of midnight." She turned to the other girls. "Wouldn't I love to be her fairy godmother!"

"The reason she's such a dear, Jane," Christina assured her tall twin, "is because she doesn't need a fairy godmother. She goes ahead and makes her good times for herself, and she doesn't let her bad times worry her. Now that call on Cecilia and Alexandra that we promised each other we'd make before dinner ——"

"Is going to be one of my bad times," Jane cut in blandly. "Well, come along, girls. I'll try not to let it worry me."

"Try not to worry us, Jane," amended Christina severely.

"Remember I've got to live next to Cecilia all summer and other summers, too, maybe," put in Nancy.

"That reminds me, Nancy." Christina pulled out a letter and passed it to her twin. "Mother's written to know when we're coming home. Our two weeks' visit was up several days ago."

"Oh, but you can't go until we've finished the Green Knight's case," Nancy protested. "You don't want to, do you?"

"Does your mother think so too?" asked Jane, evidently prompted by something in the letter she was reading.

"She told me to-day to keep you just as long as I could," Nancy assured them heartily.

"Then that settles it," said Jane. "Mother won't specially mind, and we couldn't bear to leave the mystery of the Green Knight unsolved behind us. It would seem like defeat. Under the circumstances, N. Lee, I promise to be superbly polite to the hateful Cecilia. Only don't stay long."

The mystery of the Green Knight was destined to grow deeper before it was solved. Even his trio of staunch defenders was forced to admit that the evidence, though circumstantial, was strong against him in the matter of the big robbery at the Inn. Dick, Little Peter, and Johnny Andrews declared solemnly that the case was as good as proven; and the two professional detectives who came out from town, in the interests of the Inn management and Mrs. Augustus Walker, confidentially assured their clients, who confidentially told their friends, that they agreed with the boys.

But Hope Haskins, who knew more about what happened than any one else, disagreed.

"He's a queer boy, and queer accidents might happen to him," Hope declared. "He acted as if he was telling the truth, and I believe him. Besides, I know it wasn't his hand I touched. I know that positively."

But this is getting ahead of the story.

Hope was quite correct in her assumption that the night of the regatta would be a busy one for her. Hughes, the office-boy, was madly in love with Miss Thornton, who had charge of the telephone switchboard and the news-stand. This fact seemed to both of them a sufficient reason for deserting their posts for others, within sight of the hotel entrance and hearing of the telephone bell, on the invitingly empty, moonlit piazza. But Hughes speedily turned his back on the view of the entrance, and the witty remarks of her escort, or perhaps the music that drifted up from the boat-house and the lighted craft in the harbor, completely diverted Miss Thornton's attention from the unromantic tinkle of the telephone.

So Hope, running down to get a paper for Mrs. Augustus Walker, took two messages for guests who were out on the water. Coming back to change the paper—Mrs. Augustus Walker, having decided in the interval before its delivery that a *News* would suit her better than a *Mirror*—Hope noticed a young man standing uncertainly in front of the deserted office desk. Hope considered. She had no idea where Hughes was. The other girls who were supposed to be on duty were not to be seen. If she delayed in delivering the *Mirror*, Mrs. Augustus Walker would certainly

"HAS A TELEGRAM COME?"

change her mind again about it. So, "I'll be back in just a minute," she called to the perplexed figure by the office, and darted off, hoping that Mrs. Augustus Walker would let her fulfil her promise literally.

Hurrying back without very much delay, Hope found the office enclosure still empty and the boy still waiting patiently beside it.

"Has a telegram come for Lawrence, Halcyon Inn?" he demanded, as soon as Hope appeared.

"I'll see." Hope ran through the little pile of telegrams on the file.

"Nothing yet," she assured him pleasantly. "Did Mr. Lawrence ask you to come up and see?"

"Oh, no," said the boy easily. "It's our telegram—that is, it's my mother's. It's really a cable. That's her cable address—Lawrence. We live out on the Point, but she ordered the message wired here to save time. We haven't a telephone out at our cottage, and she thought they probably wouldn't bother to send a boy before morning. Do they mind—the Inn people, I mean?"

"Not a bit," Hope assured him politely, and suddenly spied a tiny green feather in his hatband. Could he be the Green Knight? Lawrence—his mother's cable address. Did one use one's name for that purpose? Hope hadn't much idea what a cable address was, but it seemed a

queer thing to have, especially for people who didn't have a telephone. And queerness was the family characteristic. "If you'll tell me where to send the message, I'll have it delivered from here to-night," she suggested, thinking gleefully that the address would clinch the boy's identity.

But he didn't give it. "I'll wait on the piazza, thank you," he said instead. "The telegram is sure to come in a short time, you see." He hesitated. "What's happening on the bay to-night?"

Hope explained. "That's why we're so deserted up here. I presume you'd rather wait at the boathouse."

"Crickets, no!" said the boy. "I'm not expected. Besides, I should be sure to get mixed up with —— No, I can't do it, gay as it looks down there, and much as I feel like gay doings. I'll wait on the piazza. Crickets! What's that?" as a bell jingled with noisy persistence.

"House-bell service. Mrs. Augustus Walker, I suppose. If the telephone rings before I get back, would you answer it? It might be your telegram."

"Sure, I'll see to it," answered the boy pleasantly.

"Thank you." Hope, having verified her suspicion as to the ownership of the noisy bell, darted off, intent upon silencing it, and then finding the

missing office-force and assuring them that she really couldn't run the whole hotel, considering that it contained Mrs. Augustus Walker.

She found that lady in a state approaching hysteria. "Hope, where have you been? Where are my black pearls? I told you to bring them straight to me, and the next thing I knew you'd vanished."

Hope stared blankly at Mrs. Walker, who was sitting up in bed, one hand holding a purple boudoir-cap much awry on her head, and the other clutching a pink negligée tightly around her throat. Had Mrs. Augustus Walker gone suddenly crazy, Hope wondered dizzily, or had she herself?

"Why, Mrs. Walker," she began, after a moment of bewildered hesitation, "you never asked me to get you anything like that. I got you a paper. Hadn't you better lie down?"

"You mean to say you didn't hear me?" demanded Mrs. Walker excitedly. "But I heard you distinctly, rustling around among my suffrage papers. I thought you'd decided to sit and read a little, as I invited you to, the first time I rang. And when I spoke, you answered me. You said yes, or so I supposed, though it sounded more like a grunt. And I told you not to mumble your words. Didn't you hear that either?"

"Oh, I wasn't there! I went straight downstairs, because I had left some one waiting in the office."

"Then who—— You didn't go out through my sitting-room?"

"No," said Hope firmly.

"Then who—— You get my pearls now—top-drawer, right-hand corner, wardrobe trunk. Hurry, oh, hurry!"

Hope hurried. The trunk stuck, as it always did whenever Hope had been instructed to open it. The drawer stuck; a month of seaside damp had swelled it. And when it finally opened, it held only a very big purple bow and a very small bottle of smelling salts. Hope wrenched the drawer loose and ran with it to Mrs. Walker.

"Gone!" cried that lady. "Gone! I told somebody to get 'em, and they did it. Another robbery!" Clutching the pink negligée tighter, Mrs. Augustus Walker leaped from her bed to the floor, and flinging open the door chanted lustily, "Help, burglars! Help, burglars! Boy! Boy!"

Mrs. Walker's room was directly over the office.

"Shall I come up?" called a voice from below.

"No, send Mr. Bliss. This is business for the proprietor." Mrs. Walker turned to Hope. "Switch on all the lights!" she cried. "Lock all

the doors! He hasn't been gone from here long. We may catch him."

The loiterers on the piazza appeared, attracted by the shouting. Miss Aurelia Pringle, discovering its tenor, promptly fainted. Old Mr. Richardson ran to guard the front entrance, leaving Hughes free to watch at the rear. Up-stairs Hope went swiftly down the long corridors, switching on lights in all the rooms. Almost everywhere the intruder had left his trail: bureau drawers emptied, trunks hastily unpacked, closets ransacked and in disorder. On the floor above, only a few rooms appeared to have been disturbed, but Hope went on, lighting them all. At the entrance to the servants' wing she hesitated and started to turn back, then remembered with a start that she had left her summer's savings in an envelope in her wash-stand drawer. Mr. Bliss and Miss Willis had both paid her that afternoon, and a foolish desire to see all her little hoard together had made her ask Hughes to give her her envelope out of the hotel safe. Before she got it back, the regatta excitement had begun, and she had stuck the precious envelope in the first hiding-place that suggested itself.

"But no burglar would go back there," she thought. "We have nothing worth stealing. Only maybe he wouldn't know where the wait-

resses sleep. And he might easily try to get out that way." This last idea furnished Hope with the necessary excuse for looking after her money.

There were no lights to switch on in the narrow back-hall. Fearlessly, in spite of her pretext for being there, Hope felt her way to her own door and then over to the corner where her match-box hung. She had just found it when a shadow dodged out of the next corner and swept past her. Hope reached frantically after it, and caught an arm, hung on for a minute, felt the arm slipping away and made a final clutch at a hand that a minute later had swung out at her and knocked her back hard against the wall. Staggering forward, she saw the figure—a mere shadow—vanish down the steep back-stairs. Hope put her head out the window and shouted down into the darkness: "He's coming out the back way. He's coming! The burglar!"

"Right-oh!" somebody called back. There was the crashing of a heavy body through the shrubbery, a shout, then disappointed silence.

"Perhaps the policeman will get him at the corner. He's been notified," suggested somebody.

So no one had caught him here. Hope lighted her lamp, noticed, almost without caring, that her money was gone, and went wearily down to the

office. Hughes was back in his place, and Miss Thornton, the picture of dutiful attention to her task, bent over her switchboard.

"I say, Miss Haskins, you won't tell on us?" she pleaded, as Hope passed.

"You'll keep quiet about where we were?" begged the boy. "It wouldn't have made any difference ——"

"Crickets!" The three looked up to see a dripping figure standing in the door. "Has he come —the manager, I mean? He almost drowned me ——"

It was the boy who wanted his mother's telegram—probably the Green Knight.

Just then Mr. Bliss came hurrying down from an interview with Mrs. Walker.

"What do you want here?" he asked brusquely of the strange boy.

The boy explained.

"Well, it's come," called Miss Thornton, anxious to appear efficient. "Jock o' Dreams a winner. Best terms arranged for England. Congratulations. Morris," she read from the yellow slip.

"Thanks," called the boy. "I'm too wet to come in after it, but I can remember. Did the manager get here all right? He almost drowned me ——"

"I'm the manager," snapped Mr. Bliss, "and I

never saw you before. What do you mean by saying I nearly drowned you?"

"I never saw you before either," said the boy pleasantly. "The man who said he was the manager was taller and slimmer than you. Otherwise it was too dark to see. Did you get the burglar?"

"Before we go into that," said the manager curtly, "suppose you finish telling me how you got so wet."

The boy nodded. "One thing at a time," he agreed sagely. "Why,"—he turned to Hope,—"I was waiting down here for a telegram. You know about that. When the old lady up-stairs called, I asked if I should come up and she said no, find the manager." He nodded at Hope again. "You heard us calling back and forth. Well, I went. Down at the wharf a man was just coming in in a boat—or he might have been going out. I asked if he knew where the Inn manager was, and he said he was the manager, so I told him what had happened. First he said, 'Get in and we'll row up.' But I said, 'You're excited. We're as near as we can get now. This is the Inn dock.' And then he said, 'So it is. Take my oars, will you, while I jump out?' Well, I reached for the oars, and he was so excited that he let the boat slip back and I was pulled in. It's a job to swim in

all your clothes. Still," added the boy pleasantly, "I didn't blame him for not stopping to help me out, under the circumstances. But you say he wasn't the manager?"

"And who are you?" demanded Mr. Bliss, disregarding the question.

"I'm Lawrence Masters, Junior," answered the boy promptly, "spending the summer with my mother, Mrs. Lawrence Masters, out at the cottage called 'Fair Acre,' on the Point."

"I see." Mr. Bliss's curt manner had vanished. "Sorry you got wet trying to help us. You'd better cut for home, hadn't you? Here's your telegram. We may call on you later to help with the identification of our burglar."

"But I didn't see ——" began the boy.

"You heard," smiled Mr. Bliss.

"That's so," laughed the boy. "Maybe that might help. Good-night, sir."

Mr. Bliss stepped quickly to the office-boy. "Follow that fellow," he ordered softly. "Don't lose him. If he goes to the 'Fair Acre' place, watch there till you're relieved. Annex a Point policeman if you have a chance. Miss Thornton, call up that detective agency. Tell 'em to send out their very best men on the double-quick. Is Jock o' Dreams a horse, I wonder? It's a little late in the season for the big English races."

"Oh, Mr. Bliss!" Hope's eyes were big with fright and unhappiness and a sense of her terrible responsibility. "Oh, Mr. Bliss, that boy isn't the burglar. He came for his mother's telegram, just as he said. The burglar has soft, long hands, but that boy's are hard and broad; and his coat is smooth, not fuzzy like that boy's. I had hold of his hand and arm. Oh, I'm sorry I couldn't hold tighter! But I do know that this boy is all right."

"Ever hear of accomplices, little girl?"

"Yes, sir," responded Hope quickly. "But this boy ran right off to get you."

"He ran right off," agreed Mr. Bliss, "on a fool's errand, and he comes back—after the burglar's escape—with a cock-and-bull story he can't prove. It's up to the detectives, but my impression is that the Masters family at 'Fair Acre' will bear watching. By the way, Miss Haskins, Mrs. Walker exonerates you of all blame."

"Oh, I do thank her for that!" cried Hope eagerly. "Because I'm afraid I ran away while she was still talking, and that might have misled her into thinking I was there. I lost forty-nine dollars myself, Mr. Bliss."

"You did!" Mr. Bliss was duly sympathetic. "Those pearls were worth four thousand, Mrs. Walker says. There's no telling to-night what else is gone. Oh, here they come!"

The rumor of the Inn robbery had sped from the boat-house out over the bay, and the guests were hurrying up, in a clamorous, frightened crowd to see what they had lost. Hope watched them sadly, wishing she could have caught the burglar for them. But they were inclined to make a heroine of her for her unsuccessful attempt, and to divide the blame between Mr. Bliss and the Point police service.

"I'm the man you ought to hate most cordially," she heard Mr. Ellis telling a bevy of ladies. "I'm to blame for clearing the house out to-night and so giving the fellow his chance."

"Did you lose anything, Mr. Ellis?" somebody asked.

"I really haven't looked yet," returned that gentleman. "Nothing of value, I dare say. A man doesn't scatter his valuables about as you ladies do."

"Whose boat were you in to-night, Mr. Ellis?" demanded Louise Minot.

"Er—I was at the boat-house," Mr. Ellis explained drawlingly.

"You never asked me to dance," pouted Louise.

"I didn't dance, Miss Minot. I was a bit fagged with all my arrangements, you see. Just sat in the cool and enjoyed life. Didn't realize what a bad job I'd put up on you all."

"He looks awfully hot now," reflected little Hope. "I suppose he's excited. I wonder how he got his trouser-leg wet." With a little shivering sigh Hope trudged wearily off to bed.

CHAPTER XVI

CATCHING AN EEL

Mrs. Augustus Walker's four-thousand-dollar pearls had been seen on suffrage platforms in every American metropolis. Mrs. Walker regarded them as a mascot for the cause, and her attack of nerves grew more acute as the days went by without their reappearance. But it was not Mrs. Walker's loss but Hope's, naturally, that fairly brought tears to the eyes of Nancy and Christina, and set the less sentimental Jane ablaze with righteous indignation.

"It's a shame! A burning shame!" Jane declared hotly. "Even a burglar ought to have some decent feelings. He must have known that poor little room was servants' quarters. And yet he risked being found to prowl around there a while longer and get a few extra dollars."

"Perhaps he was just hanging around, waiting for a good chance to run," suggested Christina charitably. "And I suppose they feel that they have to use their time to advantage. It's a sort of business like any other."

"And it has rules of fair conduct like any other," amended Jane. "If I thought that Lawrence who-are-you-Masters, Jr., had anything to do with a mean, sneaking, small, outrageous, underhanded person like this burglar, I—I'd ——"

"But he hasn't," objected Nancy.

Jane shook her head gloomily. "Every one else thinks that he has, or that his mother has. It does look fishy,—all that talk about a cable and then the drowning episode. It's easy to say that the burglar pushed Lawrence into the water, but why on earth should he? He could easily have promised to go and find the manager himself, and so have avoided a scene. I met Johnny Andrews just now down at the mail-box, and he discouraged me dreadfully. He was feeling very gay himself, because one of the real detectives has told him that as you grow older you just naturally get over the habit of sleeping so soundly."

"Hadn't the real detective anything more to the point to tell him?" demanded Nancy.

"No," Jane reported. "He says they haven't seen anything wrong at 'Fair Acre.' Hope's soft-handed, long-fingered man has vanished from these parts, leaving only that one insufficient clew. Lawrence Junior has dug as usual, from daybreak to a civilized breakfast hour, near Judge Smith's barns. Mrs. Lawrence, Senior, has wan-

dered around the garden a lot and she's stopped wearing her green veil. There's nothing suspicious in that—the suspicious thing was to wear it."

"I don't think detective work is very interesting," sighed Nancy. "You never seem to get anywhere."

"And you have to be so careful," added Christina, "not to let the ones you're detecting see what you want."

Jane arose, the light of inspiration in her eyes. "Good-bye," she said. "I'm going out on Baxter's, I guess,—alone—to think. While I'm gone, you two be thinking here."

"What about, Jane?" demanded Christina practically.

"A way to earn back Hope's money for her," said Jane. "Isn't that our next job?"

"We never can decide on anything without you, Jane," protested Nancy. "All our ideas will seem silly compared to what you'll just jump at in a second."

"Very well, then," said Jane resignedly. "Think about the weather, or don't think at all. You can't come with me, if that's what you're driving at, because what I'm going to do I can do best by myself."

"What you're going to do?" demanded Nancy.

"That's what I said," Jane returned, and started off down the path to Lighthouse Road.

Christina looked after her soberly. "She generally wants me," said the small twin with a sigh. "She must be thinking of something wonderful, to act like that."

What Jane was thinking of was: how to catch an eel. The Lawrence boy was the eel. Johnny Andrews had told her, along with other scraps of assorted information, that the Green Knight had finished digging, been home for breakfast, and gone off to Baxter's Reef. Jane was going to Baxter's Reef. She was going to find out whether the Green Knight was the Inn burglar's accomplice. She was going to see how he felt about Hope's money. The others were all roundabout in their efforts; Jane intended to go straight to the point. But first she must catch her eel, and having failed at that sundry times before, she had an unwonted lack of confidence in her ability to succeed this time.

So she hurried very fast along the road to the causeway, thinking, as she went, of various plans for making the queer boy stop and talk to her. If she could once get near him on the Reef, Jane felt she could rely on opening the conversation in a way to pique his interest and make him stop a few moments, at least, to listen.

She did not meet him on the road ; the causeway was deserted. Jane hopped along from one dry stone to another, scanning the big rock between hops. Nobody to be seen there, either; but of course the boy would be out on the ocean side. Gaining the top, with high hopes for the success of her enterprise, Jane was bitterly disappointed to find this side of the reef, also, deserted. Slowly she crept down the sloping rocks. There was nobody else out there. Dejectedly she sat down in a sheltered nook, gazing idly out at sea. Suddenly she jumped up. Almost at her elbow, just around the corner of a jutting crag, somebody had begun to whistle. When Jane jumped, the whistling ceased abruptly, and a low voice that seemed to come straight out of the rock said, "Crickets!" A minute later the Green Knight's head and shoulders wriggled up through a crack in the cliff. "Hello!" said the Green Knight sociably. "Sorry I scared you. I'm exploring an underground passage. It's pretty narrow at this end." He wriggled a little further out of the crevice.

"You didn't really scare me," said Jane, grinning down at her literally trapped eel. "Want me to pull you out?"

"If you'd just give me a hand up," said the boy, "I could sort of walk out by some footholds there are on the side."

"All right." Holding to a point of rock behind her with one hand, Jane held out the other to the boy. "And when you're rested you must show me where the passage begins. I love secret passages and caves and things like that."

"There's—a—dandy—cave," panted the boy, struggling up from the passage-end, "over on those rocks off there." He pointed to a cliff down the shore. "But you can't get there except at dead low tide. I'll show you some time. Let's sit down here—unless you'd rather go further down."

"No, I like it here," gasped Jane. The elusive Green Knight was actually pressing his society upon her! He, not she, was arranging their interview, and planning excursions for the future.

"You see," said the boy, as if reading his companion's thoughts, "I'm going to have some fun after to-day—that is, if I have any luck this afternoon. Wish me success!"

"Why, yes, of course I do," said Jane, resolved not to ask questions until she had switched the conversation around to the topic she was most interested in.

"Not that I haven't had fun so far," the boy went on. "When you're playing around alone you find out lots of things and get interested in lots of things that you never bothered about before. I haven't minded it as much as my mother did.

But then she doesn't care for exploring as I do, and she had to wear that veil. I say, you have awfully jolly times at the Lees', don't you?"

"Rather!" agreed Jane enthusiastically.

"They asked me to come there, the day I helped your friend home," said the boy, "and I'm going as soon as I can—to-morrow, if my luck holds this afternoon."

Jane saw a chance to switch the conversation and used it. "We're interested in nothing but the Inn burglary now," she said. "An awfully nice girl at the Inn, a friend of ours, lost all the money she had saved by working there this summer."

"She did! What a shame!" cried the boy. "So there really was a robbery. I thought the comical old lady was the only one who lost anything, and I had an idea that she'd find her jewelry after a while just where she left it. So it was a real robbery, was it?"

"Of course it was," Jane assured him. "Why, the girl who lost the money had hold of the burglar for a minute. If the men down-stairs had been as brave as she, I don't believe he'd have got away."

"I say," cried the boy, "I wasn't very keen, was I? I suppose he was the fellow who splashed me into the water. But as I didn't know the manager, I couldn't suspect anything wrong at

the time. I wonder if the girl I talked to was your friend."

Jane nodded. "She told us about you."

"She seemed like a jolly sort," said the Knight. "I say, I've saved lots of allowance this summer. Spending money alone is no fun. I'm going to bring some of it for you to give to her, when I come to the Lees'. I'll bet my mother sends some too. She can't bear to know that people are in trouble and she not helping."

"Doesn't she know about the burglary, either?" asked Jane.

"Crickets, no!" said the boy. "We don't know anything that's going on here. We're hermits. We've been hermits, that is. She's through now. She was going to have a garden party this afternoon to celebrate being through, but none of our neighbors could come."

Jane resolved on a bold stroke. "Why couldn't they?" she demanded.

"Oh, different reasons," said the boy easily. "Mother said she guessed they thought she was too queer to associate with. Being hermits does make people appear queer."

"Well, you certainly appear queer," Jane burst out upon him suddenly. "I've talked to you for ten minutes, and you've mixed up so many things I don't know about with a few things I do that

I might just as well be doing a puzzle-picture. Why don't you try to act sensibly? Why don't you try to explain things instead of mixing me up?"

"Why, I will to-morrow," said the boy gently. "It wouldn't be playing the game for me to explain to-day. I expect it's not exactly according to rules for me even to be talking to you to-day, but after I'd startled you so what could I do? I didn't want to seem rude. I want to come to the Lees', you see, where they have such jolly doings. I liked that girl; she was so game when her ankle ached like the dickens. Those three boys seem like a good sort, too, and if there's one game I'm fond of it's tennis."

With as much dignity as she could command, Jane scrambled to her feet. "I must be going now," she said.

The boy jumped up too. "I'll show you the passage," he volunteered.

"I'm afraid I haven't time now," said Jane stiffly.

"Shucks!" objected the boy. "It's right on your way."

"No, thank you," said Jane, starting off.

Solemnly the boy stared after her, then swiftly followed. "I say," he began, "you think I'm too queer to associate with, don't you?"

"Maybe I do," agreed Jane, without turning her head.

"But there's nothing wrong in being queer," he declared. "I s'pose we are queer, my mother and I, but——"

"Nothing wrong, unless——" Jane shrugged meaningly.

"Unless what?" challenged the Green Knight with determination.

"Why, unless there *is* something wrong, of course." Jane's air was suddenly superior. "Queer people sometimes have queer reasons for telling queer stories and doing queer things, and for keeping themselves out of the way and not showing their faces."

"Not showing their faces?" repeated the boy. "Oh, you mean the green veil. That's the cream of the whole joke, that veil. I thought of it, and my mother has needed it several times, I can tell you. But if you mean you think my mother is a suspicious character, because we've been playing hermit so hard, you're most awfully mistaken. Why, my mother is——" The boy broke off suddenly. "She's told me never to say that. And I promised myself solemnly, cross my heart, not to tell a soul about what we were doing till we'd finished. I won't finish till to-morrow—if I have luck. Still, rather than have anybody

thinking ugly things about my mother, I'll tell you anything you want to know." Jane's rapid pace had brought them by this time across the causeway. "Come back on the rock and sit down and fire your questions."

"Tell me here," demanded Jane coolly.

Just at this critical moment a figure strolled into view down the bushy path to the causeway and confronted Jane and her escort: a tall, slender man, with slender, white, long-fingered hands.

Seeing the two, he raised his hat to Jane and called out to the boy, "Good-morning, Masters! I caught an early train from town because I find I must be back again this afternoon. So if we can get our business over by lunch-time, it will suit me, and your mother thought it might suit you too."

"Yes, sir. Of course, I'll come right back with you." He turned to Jane. "I'm sorry I can't stop," he told her. "But it's all right. I can explain everything when I see you again. Wish me success, so I can begin having fun to-morrow."

Ignoring the frigidity of Jane's bow, the Knight waved her the gayest of good-byes and sprang up the bank to join the strange man, who was tall and slender and who had long, white, undoubtedly soft hands.

Slowly Jane climbed the bank to the road. Gloomily she trudged home. She had launched her bold stroke, and it had failed. Worse than that, she found her faith in the Green Knight badly shaken. Why hadn't he been plain and straightforward with her from the first? Then the opportune interruption—by the man with the long, white hands. That was certainly suspicious. And if the Knight and his mother were crooks and mixed up with the Inn robbery and the earlier one at the Parke cottage, why, Jane had warned them. She had let the Knight know they were distrusted. They would be on their guard now. Jane longed to tell the boys about her glimpse of the strange man, but that would involve telling them also how she had muddled things in her interview with the Green Knight. She decided to tell nobody what had happened—not even Christina.

"Well, Miss Jane Learned," Nancy hailed the wanderer as her lagging steps approached the Birdcage, "if you've thought about as many things, besides the weather and nothing at all, as we have, you've been busy."

"Haven't thought of anything." Jane dropped into her favorite chair. "Sun made my head ache."

"Oh, you poor thing!" Christina's resent-

ment at Jane's reserve with her was instantly forgotten.

"Well, what have you decided?" asked Jane briskly, to forestall any questions about her walk.

"Lots of things," returned Nancy. "First, that we're going to do it—earn back Hope's money. I mean every single cent of it. And if we get any extra, it's to be for the Rocky Neck children's Christmas. The Rocky Neck children are yours and Christina's case, you know, Jane. So of course you want them looked out for."

"And we're going to have something that seems like Hope, Jane," chimed in Christina. "Something sparkly and fascinating—like her eyes, you know. Now do you think we'd better ask Alexandra and Cecilia and Louise Minot to help? It's going to be lots of work to earn so much money."

"And we've got to hurry like anything," put in Nancy, "because the fête at the Inn is next week Saturday. Our little thing would seem like a tag-end after that."

"And just what is ours going to be?" asked Jane casually, as if she had known all about it once but had forgotten some details.

"Oh, you know, Jane," answered Nancy quickly. "Something queer and fascinating and

sparkly—like Hope's eyes and her gulps of happiness."

"Um," assented Jane absently. "Then it ought to have mermaids in it and starfish in waving sea-pools and moonlit ripples on the water."

"But you can't have things like that, Jane," protested Christina.

"Oh, I don't know," objected Jane lazily. "Maybe we could. Then there ought to be some little, brave, bright, jolly, unexpected things, because that's like Hope, too. And an owl, of course—we can have the owl for an oracle, to tell people's fortunes." Jane smiled reflectively. "I suppose we'd better let Cecilia help. Alexandra ought to be a Summer Girl—Hope loves fluffy summer girls. And we ought to interest Miss Willis and Judge Smith and the Dales, of course. So we can't very well ignore your next-door neighbor, Nancy."

"And what shall we call it, Jane?" asked Nancy, an odd note of eagerness in her voice.

"Summer-by-the-Sea," responded Jane without an instant's hesitation. "Really it will be Hope's summer by the sea, you understand, with the troubles left out, because troubles aren't entertaining. I hope the boys will take an interest, and I think they will, because they admire Hope so for chasing the burglar. Don't you think

Johnny Andrews would make a lovely sprawly starfish?" Jane had been staring in front of her as she talked. Now she turned her near-sighted gaze upon Nancy just in time to intercept her hostess in the act of silently clapping her hands, while she smiled triumphantly at Christina, who was looking very down-hearted.

"Thanks for your applause," said Jane calmly. "Make it as loud as you like. I feel that I deserve it. I've planned this whole affair for you, starting from a few general and perfectly obvious suggestions."

"There!" cried Christina joyously. "I said we couldn't fool you into thinking we'd planned it, and Nancy said we could. Go and make lemonade for the crowd, Nancy!"

Nancy rose, pouting. "Of course I spoiled it all by clapping too soon," she sighed.

"Not this time, Miss I-Forgot," Jane assured her comfortingly. "I've been laughing up my sleeve at you two ever since I sat down here, and began listening to your childish prattle. You can't fool Jane Learned all the time! I've been taken in once this—recently, and now I'm sitting up straight and taking a great deal of notice."

When Nancy had gone for the lemonade, Jane reached over and hugged her little twin affectionately. "You're such a comfort, Christina dar-

ling," she said, " because you always believe in me. I'll never go mooning off without you again."

" No, don't, Jane," advised Christina practically, " because you never remember to keep out of the hot sun."

CHAPTER XVII

"SUMMER-BY-THE-SEA"

"You'd think that the more people you had to help, the easier things would be; but they're much harder," sighed Nancy Lee, dressing hurriedly for an "afternoon of wonder, mystery, jollity, and excitement called Summer-by-the-Sea," to quote one of the posters that flaunted from the trees along Lighthouse Road. Each poster was different and they were all amusing, having been composed by Jane Learned and laboriously printed by Peter Little. Peter had shown real devotion to Hope by plodding through all the most stupid and monotonous tasks connected with the entertainment in her behalf.

Nobody outside the small circle of Hope's friends knew that "Summer-by-the-Sea" was being given mainly to make good the loss of her earnings. Hope herself had no idea of it.

"She might feel embarrassed about coming," Nancy had decreed, "and she mustn't miss it. It will be one big gulp of joy for her, and the surprise of getting the money afterward will be another."

So the posters vaguely mentioned "local benefits"; and in view of all the promised attractions, nobody asked inconvenient questions.

Nancy was dressing in a corner of Josephine's room, for her own had been turned over to the use of what Josephine called "the fancy figures." It was early, and only one "fancy figure" had appeared, little Mrs. Miggs.

"I allus like to be on time," she had explained her early arrival. "I do get so flustered when I have to hurry."

Mrs. Miggs was to be the Owl; at least she was to personate the bird of wisdom from two to four, after which Judge Smith had agreed to take her place. Judge Smith was in the secret about Hope, and he had not hesitated a moment in promising to do "any fool thing you want" to help along so good a cause.

"Well," said Mrs. Miggs, who sat, costume in hand, ready to don it at the appointed hour and take up her abode in the hollow tree constructed by the patient Peter for the Owl's nest,—"Well, I've noticed that gen'ally if you want a thing done quick and easy, you go do it alone."

"And then you don't have to discuss it," agreed Nancy.

"Exactly," Mrs. Miggs added briskly. "But of course one person can't do but just so much.

"MY BALLOONS AREN'T HERE"

And then 'the more the merrier,' as the saying goes. For instance, I shall have more to look back to, thinking I've worn the same disguise as the richest man in Halcyon, than if he wasn't in it. I hope you ain't plumb wore out, Miss Nancy, with all of us draggin' different ways."

"Oh, no," laughed Nancy. "Jane said to let each thing manage itself, so I have. Besides, I'm not the worrying kind, you know, Mrs. Miggs. I'm the careless kind. But I've tried hard to think of everything necessary for to-day and I hope I've succeeded. There, I'm ready!"

"You certainly look awful nice," said Mrs. Miggs, surveying Nancy admiringly. "What do you represent?"

"Just myself," laughed Nancy. "I thought somebody would have to fill in cracks, so that's what I'm ready for. Jane calls me general manager, but I'm not that really. Let's go down now. Do you think lots of people will come, Mrs. Miggs?"

"You couldn't keep 'em away," declared the little lady, hopping along by Nancy's side. "Having a good time is a powerful sight of work for most folks. They won't be apt to miss all the help promised by Miss Jane's posters."

Down-stairs there was the bustle of final arrangements and last-moment complications.

"My balloons aren't here, Nancy," Cecilia Green

assailed the general manager, who preferred to consider herself a filler-in of cracks. "So I have nothing to do."

Nancy manfully repressed a smile. Cecilia had wanted to be a mermaid, until she found that the mermaids' rocks were away off at the Little cottage. Then she had wanted to be a sea-anemone, until she discovered that the Shaw brothers, who had originally been featured in the sea-garden, had decided to dress as chefs and manage the candy booth. After that Cecilia asked a great many questions, heard that Louise Minot had suggested being a balloon-seller, and bullied Louise, who had light hair, out of the part on the plea that she couldn't possibly look it. Now, dressed in a picturesque Italian costume but without her balloons, Cecilia stood frowning glumly at Nancy.

"Why, let me see. Couldn't you —— You look so pretty, Cecilia. Couldn't you just saunter around and amuse people, and get them interested in doing the different things?"

Cecilia shrugged scornfully. "No fun in that, and my costume wouldn't have any point."

Nancy thought a minute longer. "Couldn't you help serve ice-cream? They'll need more waitresses, I'm sure. The girls there are wearing peasant dresses."

"But that's so commonplace," sniffed Cecilia.

Christina Learned, who had joined them in time to hear most of this colloquy, came loyally to Nancy's rescue.

"You may have my place at the Lettuce Patch, Cecilia," she offered. "Italians sell vegetables."

The Lettuce Patch was near the candy booth. It was one of Jane's "little, brave, bright" touches —a novel variety of grab-bag. The paper lettuce-heads were growing in a sand-bed, and patrons chose their own plants, each of which had a "surprise package" instead of a root.

"Yes, my costume would be all right for that," agreed Cecilia complacently.

"But what will you do, Christina?" asked Nancy anxiously.

"Oh, I'll find plenty of things," returned Christina, who was whole-heartedly interested in the success of the afternoon. "For one I'll probably have to make more lettuce plants. I don't think we have enough, especially if Cecilia sells them."

"I can sell lots," chimed in Cecilia eagerly. "I know so many people here, somehow—lots more than Alexandra does."

"But, Christina, you don't want to be working in the house ——"

Somebody else came running up to the general manager with a tale of woe about the ice-cream, and

Nancy had to let Christina and Cecilia settle their own destinies.

Mrs. Miggs had been quite right about the effect of Jane's posters upon the population of Halcyon. Just as everybody who had been asked to help had joyously consented, and suggested friends who would like to help too, so everybody who could have been expected to do so came to behold the glories of "Summer-by-the-Sea," and brought others with them. The mermaids, down on the Littles' rocks, were admired by thronging multitudes. The sea-gardens, to which one was carried in the Andrews motor-boat, with their giant starfish and mammoth sea-anemones in assorted colors, were so popular that other boats had to be pressed into service. More ice-cream was ordered in hot haste. The gardeners sold all the flower-sticks contributed by Miss Willis before three o'clock, and the dairy-maids had almost as good luck with their flowers. The Lettuce Patch was not half big enough, in spite of Christina's efforts to keep it replenished, and the Summer Girls' dancing pavilion-by-courtesy on the tennis-court was a scene of gaiety all the afternoon. As for the Owl, you couldn't get near the wise bird's lair without a long interval of patient waiting in line.

"But she's worth waiting for," Mrs. Augustus Walker assured everybody loudly. Mrs. Walker,

who had suddenly decided that her shattered nerves needed the tonic of social intercourse, was patronizing "Summer-by-the-Sea" in royal fashion. "She's so quick and so clever! I asked her about my pearls, of course. 'You lost them through your own fault,' she said, 'and you'll find soon what became of them.' Now it was my own fault, but how did she know that? I haven't felt called upon to make a laughing-stock of myself by telling that part of the story. You know I really believe those pearls will be found! I thought it would do me good to come down here to-day!"

Mrs. Miggs was such a success at pleasing the crowd that Nancy wished she might keep at it all the afternoon, especially as Judge Smith was making himself very useful as a "barker" for the sea-garden, where Clare was a pink anemone. But as she was afraid of arousing his irascible temper if she suggested the change, she escorted him to the Owl's nest at the proper time, and there Mrs. Miggs, before she relinquished the Owl's head, told his fortune.

"You're a wise man," squeaked the Owl, "but you ain't been for long. You've learned something to your advantage this summer, and you'll learn more before it's gone. Somebody'll give you a lovely present ——"

"Here!" Judge Smith interrupted her gaily.

"You're all right so far, but you'd better stop. Nobody gives me presents! Now wait a minute. Help me into those feathers, and then I'll tell your fortune. *You're* going to inherit a tidy bit of money before the summer's over. You're going on a journey. You're —— Upon my word, I think you're going to be married, Mrs. Miggs."

"Will you hear that?" tittered Mrs. Miggs excitedly. "Me inherit money? Why, there ain't a Miggs in the world that's got a penny to leave, or a Ferris either. I was born a Ferris. I shan't worry about the journey or the wedding till I see the money, Judge Smith."

After that the general manager had a strenuous time of it. First Hope burned her wrist badly with hot water at the tea-stand. Then Clare Smith fell off her rock into the water, and though she could be easily dried off, her sea-anemone costume could not, and she was inconsolable until Susan suggested that Billy find somebody to take his place in the sea-garden, and Clare and he get her pony-cart and rent rides down the road to the children. Next, the girl who had been washing sherbet glasses inexplicably disappeared, and Nancy set to work at that job.

So it was in the kitchen, bending over her pans of hot water, that, late in the afternoon, Cecilia found her.

"The Lettuce Patch is sold out," she announced, looking in the window at hot, hurrying Nancy.

"That's good," said Nancy absently. "Want to carry some of these glasses down to the Bird-cage?"

"No," said Cecilia briefly, "I'm tired but I'll find Peter for you. He's another of these tireless workers."

Peter appeared in a minute, followed presently by Cecilia. This time she came around to the kitchen door. "I'll wipe for you," she offered. "Peter says I'm an awful shirk. Does—does Dick think I am a shirk?"

"I never heard him say so," said Nancy.

"Peter calls me a cheat too," went on Cecilia calmly. "He said you knew I cheated in the tennis-match with Christina Learned."

"Oh, well ——" began Nancy, dreadfully embarrassed.

"Then you did think so!" Cecilia had the grace to blush hard. "I thought of course you wouldn't have asked me to help to-day, and Christina certainly wouldn't have given up her place to me, if you agreed with Peter." Cecilia gave a sigh. "I—I didn't mean to cheat, Nancy. Honestly, when I want to win at tennis, I see the balls the way I want them to be. Look here." Cecilia laid down her dish-cloth and faced Nancy sol-

emnly. "Will you please tell me what fun you've had out of this show? You've run around helping fussy old ladies, and you've bandaged up Hope Haskins, and dried off that dreadful Clare Smith, and washed dishes. You haven't danced once, or had an ice, or talked to any of the boys. What's the use?"

"Why, just to get things done, I suppose," Nancy suggested doubtfully. "A lot of hard work goes into a thing like this—into anything that's worth doing—even into real fun."

"I never thought about that," said Cecilia. "Anyhow, I always try to get out of the work. So does Alexandra, but she's more polite about it, so people like her better. Tell me honestly, Nancy, do you really like to work for other people the way you're doing to-day for Hope?"

"Yes, I do," said Nancy promptly.

"Of course it makes you awfully popular," mused Cecilia.

"Oh, Cecilia!" Nancy stopped splashing to protest. "It's not that! It's just—oh, a feeling inside."

Cecilia sighed. "It's a feeling that's left out of me, I'm afraid. But I do think it was square of Christina Learned to let me have her place, and I'm going to tell her so. Peter says I act as if it was the natural thing for people to give up things I want."

"Peter's very frank, isn't he?" laughed Nancy.

"Well," Cecilia confessed honestly, "I—I generally nag him into it. Here he comes now. Don't you ever tell him or Alexandra that I'm beginning to see that maybe I am a shirk and selfish and a snob and—oh, but I never did mean to be a cheat, Nancy!"

"Next time you'll see the balls straight, I'm sure," said Nancy cheerfully, "and I won't tell them, of course. Just this one tray more of glasses, Peter."

"I'll tend to those in a few minutes. Put your head close to the screen, Nancy." Peter's manner was full of suppressed excitement. "The Knight's here with his mother and a strange man. He's looking for you, I think. Come right out."

"Oh, I can't, Peter," Nancy objected sadly. "These glasses will be needed in a minute, and ——"

"I'll wash for a while," volunteered Cecilia abruptly. "Go and do what he wants you to, Nancy. You might give me a chance at that good feeling," she added in a whisper, as Nancy hesitated.

The Knight and his party were having ices at the Birdcage. His mother and the man—Jane's man—were obviously enjoying the ices and the Birdcage, the crowd and the spirit of revelry that

was abroad. But the Knight nibbled his ice with an absent air, ignored the Birdcage, frowned at the revelry, and scanned the crowd anxiously for some one he could not find. When Peter and Nancy appeared he saw them instantly, and stooping to explain to his mother he went to meet them.

"Hello!" he greeted Peter cheerfully, and asked after Nancy's ankle.

"Which one?" inquired Nancy demurely. "I've had two sprains, and they're both well. You're very slow."

"I'm afraid your tall friend who's visiting you thinks so," agreed the boy. "Is she here?"

"She's off on the rocks being a purple sea-anemone," explained Nancy. "The boats take you over, if you want to see her. But I didn't know ——"

"Will you tell her that I didn't have any luck that day, in spite of her good wishes?" the boy hurried on eagerly. "But I'm hoping for better fortune to-morrow. I couldn't help feeling that my breaking the rules of my game by talking to her that day the way I did was what spoiled my chance; so I haven't dared to come and explain things to her as I promised. To-day doesn't exactly count because I came to please my mother. Will you give my message, and may I come to see you after to-morrow?"

"Yes, but when did you talk to Jane?" began Nancy, when a stout elderly lady, a stranger who had motored up from some other seaside colony, wedged her way between Nancy and the Knight, in a determined effort to see what was going on in the Birdcage. Suddenly she caught sight of the Knight.

"Why, Laurie Masters!" she cried. "You here! Where's your mother? Up there? Take me to her this instant!"

With a helpless look at Nancy, the Knight let himself be propelled resistlessly toward the Birdcage. Nancy watched the stout lady half smother little Mrs. Masters in an embrace, shake hands hurriedly with the strange man, and then, dragging Mrs. Masters along with her, while the man and Lawrence followed meekly in her train, rush back to her car.

"Some place where we can talk—thought you were in France—unfriendly not to let me know," she was gasping breathlessly as she passed Nancy. The Green Knight, to whom she had unceremoniously handed her coat, her shopping-bag, her lorgnette, and a huge bunch of sweet-peas that she had bought, stared straight ahead, his lips set in an angry line. For once in his happy-go-lucky life the Green Knight was distinctly annoyed.

"I say, Nancy," Peter, who had been among

the crowd, appeared at her elbow. "Who's the fat old party? Well, we have her sized as another confederate. When they came, Mrs. Augustus Walker sent her motor for the detectives. They've evidently got wind of it somehow. Did you see that fellow's hands—just what Hope described."

"What I want to know," said Nancy, "is when that boy ever talked to Jane."

"We'll go and ask the secretive sea-flower," said Peter.

"You go," Nancy told him. "Cecilia was so sweet about the dishes that I'd better go back."

"Before she turns sour again," laughed Peter. "Well, I'll report what Jane has to say for herself."

Peter was back before long in a state of grand excitement. He found Nancy alone, Cecilia having been summoned to help count the money from the Lettuce Patch.

"Jane saw the same man," he explained. "Why she didn't tell us about his hands passes me—some silly girl-whim, I gathered from her muddled explanations. But it's all right anyhow, as he's still here. The detectives think the crowd will try to make a killing at the cottages the night of the Inn fair. We're going to have everything guarded. Of course I shan't have the

luck to be in the right place," sighed Peter, "but it's pretty exciting, nevertheless."

Nancy had finished her dishes and come out to join Peter, just as Miss Aurelia Pringle appeared, mincing down the path and peering about her as if in search of some small and elusive object.

"Have you seen Professor Fenwick?" she asked Nancy. "I'm positively assured he's here, but I can't find him."

"I'm afraid I don't know him, but I'll try to find him for you," said Nancy obligingly.

"Thank you, my dear." Miss Aurelia Pringle sighed with relief. "This is the second time I've heard the dear man was in Halcyon. He was a devoted friend of my late brother. Tall and handsome, my dear, with beautiful, long hands. You couldn't fail to notice his hands—so refined and expressive."

With a wink at Nancy, Peter joined in the conversation. "Is your friend a professor of breaking and entering?" he asked.

"He's a professor of mathematics in the best boys' school in New York," returned Miss Pringle acidly. "I never heard of that new science you mention." She turned to Nancy. "I'll wait for you here."

"Well,"—Peter defended himself against Nancy's reproaches,—"the only man whose hands

I've noticed to-day belongs supposedly to the profession of breaking and entering."

"Supposedly!" chanted Nancy mockingly. "I wish he was still here,—Peter Little! I'd ask him if he was Professor Fenwick. Probably that's just who he is. And then up would go your silly theory about my nice Green Knight."

Peter stared. "You mean to say you still think that boy and his mother are on the square?"

Nancy nodded vigorously. "I haven't seen any good reason not to think so. He did me a very good turn, and I shan't go back on him until I have proof positive."

"Well, Nancy Lee," said Peter solemnly, "if ever I'm in trouble I hope my friends will stick the way you do."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREEN KNIGHT'S BIG DAY

THE Inn fair was only two days after "Summer-by-the-Sea." Some people thought the success of the latter entertainment would hurt the fair, but others said it had merely whetted Halcyon's appetite for gaiety. The fair opened in the afternoon, but it was sure to be best patronized in the evening, when the grounds were gay with Japanese lanterns, colored lights burned over the harbor, the booths were auctioning off bargains, and the bands played all the time.

The cottage people were all going in the evening. They told one another so ostentatiously in public places. They repeated the statement before their servants, particularly before their newer servants. There were a great many very new servants in Halcyon that week, and they were all men-servants; they had come to mow lawns or to work in the stables or to help the butler or the chauffeur. They came down from town on various trains, and got off singly, without so much as a side-glance at one another. But one thing they all had in

common; put them in the sunlight, look closely, and you could catch a glint of bright metal under their coats. Halcyon Point was to be very well policed for the Inn fair.

Dick, Peter, and Johnny Andrews had special policemen's badges too, and were so proud of the distinction that they could hardly refrain from flaunting them in public. Dick and Johnny were to stand guard at their own places. Mrs. Little would not trust Peter with theirs; she preferred one of the men from town. But Judge Smith jumped at Peter's offer to look after "Gray Gables." Each guard had a whistle, so it would be easy to summon reinforcements. If the Halcyon burglar made an attempt, individual or collective, on the Point cottages, it seemed as if he ought to pay high for it.

Peter, Dick, and Johnny spent the early evening at the fair, going and returning in Johnny's boat, because they thought that mode of departure would be most inconspicuous. It was difficult for the three young officials to realize that the eyes of all Halcyon were not on them that night. Peter was the only one who had to walk far to reach his post. He skulked along in the shadows, slunk up to the house, and let himself in by a little side-door, as Judge Smith had suggested. He had established himself in the dark at the window

that commanded the widest sweep of lawn, before he discovered that he had arrived before Judge Smith's departure.

"I've been delayed," explained that gentleman. "My caution of a grandchild insists on going with me. Susan could give her a better time, I'm sure. And she further insisted that she wasn't properly dressed for the occasion—a spot of mud on one stocking and a tumbled sash, I believe. Well, it doesn't matter. She's learning to play, and I'm learning with her. By the way, we had our ghost again this morning."

"We did!" Clare, in fresh sash and stockings, hopped into the room. "I asked the boy that digs if he heard it, but he didn't. He was here awf'lly early. He said he wasn't coming again, and I'm glad of it, because I don't like him. He left a pile of dirty old stones in the stable and I fell into it and had to be dressed all over. He wanted to see you, grandfather, but I told him you weren't here. You weren't either," Clare concluded, as if her statement had been called in question, and then added an explanatory, "But I guess I did say you'd be back to-morrow. I didn't want that boy tagging around to-night."

"No, we can't be bothered to-night," agreed Judge Smith jovially. "Good-bye, Peter. Now, Clare, forget that you've seen Peter here to-night.

Don't mention it to a soul. He'll find that ghost for you, I guess, if nobody knows he's around."

Peter sat for a while in his chosen window, made two tours of the big house without finding anything amiss, and finally, deciding that the rose arbor by the back door was a better sentry-box than the one he had first chosen, he went stealthily out to it. He had not been there five minutes before a suspicious rustling in the long grass near the garage attracted his attention. Straining his eyes Peter watched till he was sure somebody, or something, was there. Then, slinking in the shadows and darting silently across an open space, he fell upon a wriggling figure and grappled with it. To his amazement it offered no resistance, merely rolling from under him, and murmuring amiably, "That's right, old man. Two can do this job better than one." Then, as Peter's grip tightened indignantly, the voice added softly, "Crickets, you're choking me!"

"I'm arresting you," corrected Peter, speaking by some instinct in his adversary's whisper, "for trespass and disorderly conduct, and ——" Suddenly Peter remembered with chagrin that he had no evidence of a more serious charge against his captive.

"Did you think I was the burglar?" whispered the captive.

"Never mind what I think," returned Peter sternly.

"Well, I'm not. I'm Lawrence Masters, Junior, and the burglar is down in that barberry tangle, trying the kitchen window."

"While you watch up here and delay me," murmured Peter. "I'm a police officer." He showed his badge.

"That's good," breathed Lawrence Masters, Junior. "If he fights, we can hit him hard for resisting arrest. I say, Miss Lee's tall friend told me that people here think we're queer. You don't mean you think I'm in with this burglar?"

"What are you doing here, if you're not?"

"Looking after some buried treasure—unburied treasure, I mean, that's down in the stable. I was coming up to see Judge Smith, when —— I say, let's get the burglar, and then we can talk."

Peter hesitated. Here was another "fishy" story, another compromising position.

"On my honor as a gentleman, I promise to play fair and to help you," whispered the queer boy.

"And to wait afterward until your case is settled?"

"Sure, and to show you the treasure, and ——"

Peter thought hard for one long moment. There certainly was a man moving stealthily on the bar-

berry patch near the kitchen window. The Green Knight gave his word of honor. Nancy Lee believed in him.

"All right," whispered Peter. "You keep to the right side of him as we close in, and I'll bear to the left."

It had taken only a minute, that colloquy in the tall grass. The man in the barberry patch, intent on sounds within the house, had heard nothing. He was skilfully cutting a pane from the kitchen window. Peter was better at wriggling than the Knight, but the Knight was wonderful at running from cover to cover. He reached the edge of the barberry patch first, and was crouching under a very prickly bush when the man at the window turned and discovered Peter, not yet hidden. With a bound he dropped from the window ledge out into the shrubbery on the side furthest from Peter. At him flashed the Knight, regardless of brambles. Peter, blowing his whistle vigorously, ran round the edge of the shrubbery to make a flank attack. Through the barberry tangle floundered the man, just out of the Knight's reach. Out he dodged into a lilac thicket.

"Grab him!" cried the Knight, flashing his little electric search-light. Peter grabbed and caught something soft and sleek that came off in his hands—a dark silk coat. After that the man's

white shirt made pursuit easier. The Knight got the next chance to attack at close quarters, and he hung on bravely. Peter got hold and hung too.

The man fought silently, desperately. "Hang it all—do you want me to shoot?" he muttered once. But the boys hung on, sure it was an empty threat. With lights flashing in the road, and shouts and running footsteps converging from every direction, with a "bug-light" in the Knight's pocket, and a whistle in Peter's, any burglar could see that it was useless to make a bad matter worse.

"Why, Mr. Ellis!" cried Peter in astonishment. "Why, Mr. Ellis!" Two deputies had handcuffed the burglar, and the Knight had suddenly switched his light full on the man's face.

"Right you are, Little Peter," returned the burglar. "I'm done for. You boys put up a good fight."

Peter's eyes dropped to Mr. Ellis's hands. Yes, they were white and soft and slender. It made fastidious Peter a little sick to think that he had caught a man he knew, who knew him well enough to call him by his intimate nickname.

He turned to the Green Knight, and drew him to one side. "You certainly played fair," he said. "Let's get out of this. Come over to the Lees' and find Dick and Johnny and do some talking."

"Sure," agreed the Knight. "I passed my

exam in math day before yesterday. I can talk now, all anybody will stand for. But first I've got to find Judge Smith and give him the treasure."

"What treasure?" demanded Peter.

"Why, the buried treasure," explained the Knight impatiently. "I found it this morning. I never expected to. Crickets, but this is my busy day!"

In the end the Knight and Peter did go to the Lees', as Peter had suggested, and there, when Dick and Johnny, sadly envious, Nancy and Christina, noisily triumphant, and Jane a little shamefaced over her treatment of the other Trianglers, had gathered in a sociable circle on the piazza, the Green Knight, Lawrence Masters, Junior, told his story. It was late when he began, but even Mrs. Lee conceded that Halcyon Point would naturally keep late hours on this most exciting night in its history.

"Shucks! it's nothing to tell," the Green Knight began his story. "It was like this. We live in France. That is, we have stayed there almost ever since I can remember. Paris in winter and Dinard—that's a jolly little place on the north coast—in summer. Last fall we came over here, so I could go to an American school. At least that was one reason, and another was because my mother thought her English was getting rusty.

You see, my mother is —— Shucks, she's told me never to say that! Well, anyhow New York was great. We'd had plenty of fun in France, but New York was home, and there was something interesting to do every minute. We did all the jolly things there were, but this spring I found I'd flunked my math and got low marks in two other subjects, and when I told my mother she said she couldn't scold me, because she'd fallen down on her job, too. You see, my mother—well, she's told me never to say it, but I guess to-night is an exception. My mother is a writer. I guess you all know her books, but her name when she writes is different. She'd been working on a novel in New York, and when her publishers read it they told her it wasn't up to her standard, and ought not to be printed. 'And I think they are right,' my mother told me when we talked things over. 'Now, shall we go back to France and settle down to work?' You see," explained the Green Knight, "we always plan things together, my mother and I, because we're all the family there is, and we stick tight together.

"So I said, 'I hate to leave America.' 'I do, too,' said my mother. 'Then we won't let America beat us. We'll go down to Halcyon, where your grandfather and all my grandfathers lived. We'll have a little house, with only old Jules and old

Virginie'—those are our servants that we brought from France—'to work for us. I'll revise my book, and you'll dig at your math. We'll live like hermits until we've made good.' That part about hermits made me laugh, because my mother is awfully sociable, and so am I. And besides, she is known everywhere, and strangers are always rushing up to her and saying they recognize her from her pictures. So I said that if we were going to live like hermits, she'd better get a dark veil to hide herself under, and we went right out and bought it. We've had more fun over that veil! Well, we've dug at our jobs and made good. Her publishers like the novel so well now that they've arranged for English editions and translations and all that sort of thing. And I've passed off my math. That's all," ended the Green Knight serenely.

"But you dug in the ground too," added Dick Lee, who had heard from Peter about the "dirty stones" in the stables at "Gray Gables."

"Oh, that was my mother's plan to keep me out of mischief," explained the boy. "You can't dig at math all the time, you know. She said I'd be sure to pick up a lot of friends between times and forget the hermit business; and then she remembered an old map that her father's father had given his son—something about buried treasure

down here at Halcyon. That was just the thing for me to do alone, because of course a treasure-hunt is sort of a secret. Only I had to tell Judge Smith. And this morning I found the treasure —part of it, anyhow."

"What was it?" gasped Nancy and the twins in chorus.

"Oh, 'one silver tankard, two silver vessels and one gold, a chist of coin, two small silver platters and much pewter ware,'" chanted the boy indifferently. "At least, that's what the paper said. The vessels are all so black that you can't tell gold, silver, and pewter apart. The 'chist' is locked. It was all I could do to lift it, so if the coins are gold or even silver, there must be quite a hoard."

"Weren't you fearfully excited?" demanded Jane, curious about the Knight's offhand manner.

"Why—no," he said, "I was embarrassed. I was excited enough for a minute, when my shovel struck something hard, but after that I didn't know what to do about it. I was going to leave the stuff right where it was, but Judge Smith was away, and I had to put it somewhere. I piled it up in the stable, in a part that they don't use. I thought it would be all right till morning, but when I told my mother she sent me

straight down to speak to Judge Smith or some other responsible person. And in that way I got mixed up with the burglar."

"For the last but not the first time," added Johnny Andrews in his most judicial manner. "Now will you kindly tell us the name of your long-fingered friend? I mean the fellow who was with you at 'Summer-by-the-Sea.'"

"And who came to the Reef for you," added Jane quickly.

"Oh, that was Professor Fenwick. I flunked my math to him and mother got him down so I could know positively that I'd made good, and be able to enjoy the rest of my summer. The first time he came I couldn't satisfy him about logarithms. What's exciting you so about Professor Fenwick?"

Johnny explained.

"Well, I am relieved," sighed the Green Knight. "I suppose his hands are rather extra long and white for a man's. I'd rather you'd think Professor Fenwick was a crook than to think anything off-color about my mother or me."

There was a guilty silence.

"Oh!" sighed the Knight again. "So people did think we were crooks before that?"

"The girls didn't," from Peter.

"Except me, after that morning on the rocks,"

confessed honest Jane. "Why wouldn't you tell me anything?"

"Oh, I suppose it was silly," admitted the Green Knight, "but that's the way we'd planned it, my mother and I. We just thought that if we began to explain about the hermit business we'd waste all our time explaining. So we promised ourselves not to get into any conversations until we were through. Of course we didn't realize how people were noticing us."

"No," said Jane, "of course a deaf foreign maid, a gardener who speaks no English, a green veil, a treasure hunt, and a hermit's reserved manner wouldn't be the least bit conspicuous in any summer colony."

The boy laughed. "It does sound pretty—unusual, the way you tell it." He turned to Nancy. "I believe you're to blame," he declared. "Your brother and his chums wouldn't have noticed me much if you hadn't made me look out for you that day."

"Oh, dear!" Nancy looked the picture of woe. "I never dreamed my carelessness would get any one mistaken for burglar's accomplices. But there's one comfort; you didn't know it until it was all over. And I've told the boys right along that they were perfect sillies."

"That's right," declared Peter. "She has. I'll bet I'd have hung on to you to-night and let the

right man get away if I hadn't remembered what Nancy said."

"Well, if you've heard all you need out of me for a while," said the Green Knight formally, "I'll go up and 'tend to my treasure. Can't you fellows come along?"

So it happened that Dick, Johnny, and Peter were down at the stable with Judge Smith and the Knight when the "Gray Gables" ghost shrieked and was caught at it.

Judge Smith was more excited about the finding of the treasure than any of the boys. He insisted on going out to look it over at once, and he even set to work to clean up the tankards and vessels that night; but after vigorous use of the garden hose, the juice of two dozen lemons, most of a bag of salt, and all the available supply of metal polish, the "black lumps" were almost as black as ever. Judge Smith was a man of action.

"Here, James," he told the chauffeur, who had been summoned to contribute metal polish, "have these at a jeweler's by eight to-morrow morning. Get a receipt. Tell him I expect them to be polished like new by noon." He turned to the Green Knight. "You'll let me do that? And you'll leave the pile here on exhibition for a while? I paid a lot for this place, but between ghosts and buried treasure I'm getting my money's worth."

"They're not mine," said the boy. "They're yours; they were found on your property."

"I didn't buy any underground jewelry stores," objected Judge Smith. "You had a permit——"

"It was just a map," said the boy. "It didn't say anything about the ownership of the treasure. I never expected to find any, you see."

"Just where did you find it?" inquired Judge Smith.

"I'll show you." The Knight picked up a lantern, and armed with that and his trusty "bug-light" he led the way around to the rear of the stable. "Right here close to the foundation wall. I measured from the oak stump half-way up the hill. Old Captain Mixter remembers when it was a big tree. That was one of the things mentioned in my map, and the other was the old pond. Captain Mixter remembered just where that was, too. So I had all the landmarks I needed. I'm not sure but old Captain Mixter has the best right to the treasure, Judge Smith."

"Maybe he has. I'll tell James to have it appraised. If its value runs into the thousands, we ought to consider the matter of ownership pretty carefully."

"Into the thousands! Crickets!" Leaning back against the wall of the barn, the Knight gave vent to a long, low whistle of incredulous

amazement. "No wonder my mother thought I shouldn't leave the things lying about here over night. Into the thousands!" The Knight whistled again shrilly.

"Judge Smith! Oh, Judge Smith!" It was a woman's frightened voice, calling from the drive in front of the stable.

"Now what's happened?" demanded Judge Smith irascibly, and seizing the Knight's lantern went to find out.

It was Susan, in a state of agitation extreme even for her.

"It's the ghost, sir," she gasped, "shriekin' something fearful, and Miss Clare insisted I should come to tell you, as no one else was about. We heard it clear down-stairs, sir. I'm all of a shiver, thinkin' it was running behind me in the grass."

"Now, boys!" Judge Smith's summons was answered by the trio of ghost-hunters. The Knight, remembering that he had left a knife behind him that morning, stopped an instant to look for it with his search-light. Standing close to the barn-wall, he twisted the little light hither and yon, and, straining his eyes after his lost property, whistled softly, as was his invariable habit when he was thinking or working intently.

A shrill cry sounded from the big house. "Susan, you hurry up quick! It called again, that old thing!"

The Knight, who had stopped whistling to listen, broke out again in an amused trill. So the ghost that Judge Smith had spoken of was abroad to-night. It was certainly a big day!

"Susan, you hurry, I say! It called another time," came the shrill cry again from the big house.

With a shrug the Knight started after the others. It was clearly no time to be hunting a mere pocket-knife. As he turned from the wall, his coat-sleeve caught on some projection. It was the end of a pipe, apparently, running out an inch or two from the wall.

"Funny!" muttered the boy, with his light turned on and his lips close to the hole. "I never noticed that before, and I can't see the use of it." Then, with an annoyed shrug at having fallen again into his hermit's habit of talking to himself, he hurried to join the others. The ghost hunt was systematic but aimless, since neither Susan nor Clare could give any idea of the location of the voice. Johnny and Dick went through the cellars of "Gray Gables." Peter and the Knight poked around the grounds and stables. Judge Smith went to reassure his granddaughter. He

came back to the boys in a state of great amusement.

"The creature's learning to talk English," he explained. "The last thing it said, according to Susan, was 'Funny, I never noticed that before.' Then it relapsed into its habitual mutterings."

The ghost-hunters, who had rounded up to hold a consultation, laughed with Judge Smith at the ghost's new accomplishment—all but the Green Knight.

"Why, I said that!" he cried excitedly. "I said that very sentence. I was standing by the wall back near the treasure-hole. I caught my sleeve on a pipe, and I stopped to look at it. I've often stood against that wall to rest and think, but I never noticed the pipe-hole."

"Well, how in time could Susan hear you?" demanded Judge Smith. "Let's go and look at this pipe."

It was a china pipe-end. It had evidently been painted when the barn was painted, and at that time or some other one side had been badly chipped. Judge Smith peered at it carefully, felt it, and then, putting his lips to the hole, roared, "Hi, Susan! Hi, Clare!" joyously. Then he turned to the boys. "Come to the house and find the other end of the contraption," he ordered. "It's not a pipe. It's a speaking-tube. The man

who sold me 'Gray Gables' was a great horseman. This wall of the barn was a partition-wall in his time, with more rooms behind it. His coachman slept here, with his cot against that wall. I remember the agent's telling me that I could talk to the stables from almost any room in the house. But I put in telephones, ordered the tubes stopped up, and forgot 'em. Evidently one at least was overlooked. So you're the 'Gray Gables' ghost, young man!"

"I suppose I'm part of it, anyhow," sighed the Green Knight ruefully. "I never expected to be mixed up in anything like this. It all comes of my everlasting whistling."

"Don't you regret it, young man," ordered Judge Smith. "Don't you regret it! I've enjoyed my ghost. You fellows all come to dinner to-morrow night. We'll inspect the treasure, discuss who owns it, and who caught the ghost, and I'll pay my bills. Don't you regret whistling, young man! It's a cheerful, honest habit and it's given me a real lark. I decided to grow young down here this summer, and I've done it, thanks to my ghost."

Meanwhile down at the Inn, Hope's lovely eyes had been blindfolded, and she had identified the "Gray Gables" burglar by his hand as the same one she had encountered.

"Yes, I know that hand," Hope declared unhesitatingly. "I can't be mistaken. Oh, but I'm sorry!"

"Don't you worry for a minute, kid," Mr. Ellis told her. "I'm not worth it. I can stand what's coming to me, all right, but I don't want to spoil the shine in your eyes." He turned to the detectives. "Her identification is a farce, of course. I can furnish a complete alibi." With that Mr. Ellis, gentleman-burglar, vanished from the life of Halcyon Bay, and shortly afterward began a long term in prison.

CHAPTER XIX

A WONDERFUL WORLD

NANCY LEE sat on the Birdcage floor. In front of her were two big wicker baskets and beside them two huge piles of what appeared to be very glittery snowballs. Only close inspection revealed the fact that cotton-batting and frost-powder supplied the place of real snow. Each ball contained a toy, those in one pile being for boys and in the other for girls. The snowballs were to furnish the lighter part of the Rocky Neck children's Christmas, and Nancy was packing them in two baskets to be carefully wrapped and consigned to the guardianship of Mrs. Miggs, who had promised to attend to the carrying out of all details of the Christmas party.

The twins had gone. Nancy had not had much time to miss them, because of the Green Knight's fondness for tennis. In half an hour he and Dick would be back from bathing, and Dick and Alexandra had challenged the Green Knight and Nancy to a match. Nancy wanted to pack her baskets before that, because then she could get the

boys to wrap them up. If there was one thing Nancy Lee particularly hated doing it was wrapping unwieldy bundles. Nancy laid the snowballs in neat layers, patting each one lovingly into place. There were such cunning toys inside, gulps of joy for some of those forlorn Neck children. How lovely Hope had looked when she opened her snowball and found her lost money! Of course it was too bad, Nancy reflected, that the burglar had hidden his booty so securely that Mrs. Augustus Walker's black pearls were still missing; but it would have spoiled the beautiful climax to the "Summer-by-the-Sea" entertainment if the money had not been needed for Hope.

"A man for to see you, Miss Nancy." Rosa had come unperceived down the Birdcage path.

"For me?" Nancy jumped up hastily. "A boy, you mean, Rosa?"

"Oh, no,—very old," explained Rosa, and Nancy followed her to the house.

"Good-morning!" Judge Smith, evidently in his most impatient mood, was pacing the living-room floor.

"Oh, won't you come out and see the snowballs?" cried Nancy impulsively. "We were so sorry you couldn't be here to help wind them, and to see Hope get hers. It was splendid!"

"I don't doubt it," agreed Judge Smith drily.

"That little girl with the bright eyes interests me. We'll get to her in a minute. I've come on business. To begin with, the buried treasure is disposed of. The boy wouldn't have it. I wouldn't have it. It clearly, then, reverts to the Miggs heirs, whose ancestors put it there. There's only one Miggs heir—that little mite of a woman down on the Neck. I've had the stuff valued and sold for her—all but one or two things she wants to keep. She looks upon the ten thousand dollars from the sale as a vast fortune."

"Of course she would!" cried Nancy joyously. "She'll have the loveliest time spending it. Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Um!" Judge Smith's tone was doubtful. "She's a nice little woman, but too much of a talker for me. She told me lots of things I didn't care to know—poured 'em out on me in a stream. But all the same we got quite friendly—she's a person it's difficult to snub or to quarrel with. As she'd told me some things she meant to do with her money, I reciprocated. Several of the things I meant to do she thoroughly disapproved of." Judge Smith's eyes twinkled. "For instance, when I spoke of educating that little Timmy Raftery, she said the Fair Oaks girls had thought of that. She asked me if I wasn't young enough and smart enough to think out something for

myself. Well, I find I am young enough, and smart enough. I'm going to adopt a grandchild."

"You mean Timmy?" asked Nancy doubtfully. "I suppose you could do more for him than we girls——"

"I don't mean Timmy," roared Judge Smith. "Timmy's not my discovery, as I've just told you. I've found somebody else that suits me just as well for a grandchild, and maybe better than that young rascal. I'm going to adopt Hope Haskins."

"Oh!" cried Nancy joyously.

"I'm not going to spoil her," Judge Smith broke in hastily on her ecstasy. "The reason I need to adopt a grandchild is because all those I've got are spoiled. So while I'm in the business of helping somebody I've decided I may as well amuse myself and have what I've always wanted: a grandchild I can be tremendously, unqualifiedly proud of. So, if you approve, I'm going to choose Hope."

"If I approve!" laughed Nancy.

Judge Smith nodded gravely. "Mrs. Miggs said you're an expert on doing good yourself, and on getting other people interested in doing it. She says that if I knew all the kind things you've put through this summer, I'd be astonished. And she says that one of your principles is to have a good time yourself as you go along."

Nancy agreed eagerly. "That was Jane's idea —to make a game of it—the Lookout Game, we called it. Most of the ideas were other people's, Judge Smith, and other people did most of the helping, too. So you mustn't think that I'm a—a person to consult."

"However that may be, I'm consulting you," said Judge Smith irascibly. "Do you or don't you think Hope Haskins needs a little help on this college job, and can take it without being spoiled?"

"I certainly think she does and can," declared Nancy. "I don't believe Hope's the kind to be spoiled by anything."

"Well, I shall be very careful about that," snapped Judge Smith. "No, I can't stop for any snowballs. I'm—I'm not as cross as I sound, Miss Nancy Lee. You young people have given me a pretty good time this summer, among the whole of you." And off he went.

With shining eyes Nancy returned to her snowballs. Recklessly now she piled them in—silly little snowballs, of no account at all compared with the splendid chances that had come to Hope and to Mrs. Miggs.

"Oh, Miss Nancy!" Fluttering down the path, a picture of joyous eagerness, came Mrs. Miggs. As Nancy jumped up to meet her, the little

lady's face clouded and her hands flew up despairingly.

"You've heard!" she sighed. "I see that on your face. How I've rushed to get here, and now somebody's been beforehand with me! Ain't it lovely, though? And ain't it wonderful—just as the Owl said. I've inherited money! I've been to Doctor Dale to tell him we needn't worry and contrive any more about a change of air an' a wheel chair for my baby. There's my journey, you see, to get the change of air."

"And how about your wedding, Mrs. Miggs?" teased Nancy.

The little lady bridled and blushed and fluttered. Then she grew suddenly serious. "I don't mind telling you something, dearie. Maybe you'll think I'm forward, but at my age and his there's no time to dawdle. You've heard tell of Captain Mixter, Miss Nancy. He's blind and pretty helpless, and he ain't made none too welcome by his son's wife. Well, if he wants it too, Miss Nancy, there'll *be* a wedding. He did want it once, when we was both young, so I have hopes that he may enjoy the thoughts of comin' to live with me in a snug little house on the Neck where there's room for him an' his parrot an' his sea-shells that his daughter-in-law thinks is old-fashioned. I'll keep working long's I can, an' after that we'll set by our fire

together. There won't be no naggin' or fault-findin', and all jokes and fun welcomed. Also the things he likes to eat," ended Mrs. Miggs quaintly. "He's my oldest friend, so why shouldn't he share my good fortune?"

Nancy put splendid zest into winning the tennis-match. It was a wonderful world! She was thinking so over and over, as she slammed the balls. They all went where she wanted them to. That reminded her of Cecilia—poor Cecilia, who would be sitting alone, on the Littles' piazza. Dick and Peter and Johnny plotted nowadays to leave her out of the tennis games. They called it "teaching her a lesson." Nancy was inclined to approve their method, but to-day she was tender-hearted.

"Ask Cecilia to play the next set with you," she begged the Green Knight. "I'm tired—honestly I am. I'm not going to overwork my ankle. After I'm rested I'll make us all lemonade."

Nancy really was a little tired, but what she wanted was a chance to talk to mother. She had told the tennis players about Hope and Mrs. Miggs and they had said "Great, isn't it? Shall we toss for courts now?" Mother would understand.

She did. Nancy found her up-stairs on her very private rest-piazza. For such wonderful

news as she had, Nancy felt that she might intrude. Mother was just as interested and just as pleased as Nancy had known she would be. She drew her tall daughter down beside her in her big chair.

"I'm glad you've made so many friends this summer," she said, "friends that count. I'm glad you've made your vacation count, in spite of the ankle. That's the kind of daughter I want."

"But I've made you a lot of trouble. I've been much more trouble than help, I'm afraid," said Nancy contritely.

Mother shook her head. "You've helped me a great deal. Accidents will happen ——"

"Even when you're not careless," cried Nancy. "But I was!"

"And I'd rather have you find too many worthwhile interests outside your home than too few. Caring for nobody but one's family and intimate friends, thinking only of them, gives one a very narrow outlook. I'd far rather you were thoughtless sometimes than selfish—wrapped up in your own little world."

"Oh, mother, you're so encouraging!" Nancy rushed off to her other confidant, the faithful Red Journal. The summer's adventures had filled a great many pages. Yes, only two were left. She would ask father to send her another—the fattest

Red Journal he could find, and she would begin a second volume. But now ——

"I want to know things, to be wise," wrote Nancy at the top of the first empty page. "Hope says you can't do without wisdom, and I think she's right. But I want to put the doing of things for people who need me first of all, as Doctor Dale does, and I want always to have 'grit and good spirits,' like dear Mrs. Miggs. And I must remember not to rush ahead too fast, as Christina is always reminding me ——"

"Lemonade ahoy!" called the Green Knight's voice under her window.

Nancy dropped the poor old Journal with a bang and flew down-stairs. "Coming!" she called back. "Want to help me crack the ice?"

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